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**THE OUT OF SCHOOL LITERACY PRACTICES  
OF CHILDREN WITH  
SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES: A CASE STUDY**

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A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the degree of Master of Education

Faculty of Humanities  
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**DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **ABSTRACT**

A number of studies have been conducted on in-school and out of school literacy practices in the United Kingdom and North America within a sociocultural framework. However, there is very little research on the out of school literacy practices of children in South Africa and there is a general dearth of research on the out of school literacy practices of children with specific learning disabilities, both locally and internationally. Aiming to make a contribution towards filling this gap, this investigation explores the out of school literacy practices of children with specific learning disabilities (SLD) attending a special needs school in South Africa.

The theoretical framework of this investigation is based on New Literacy Studies (NLS) and the emergent literacy paradigm. NLS addresses literacy from a sociocultural perspective as a context embedded social practice, and includes unconventional literacy practices such as computer games and digital literacies. Emergent literacy is evident in children's pre-conventional reading and writing before they enter school. The intersection of these two paradigms lies in the 'unconventional', which is not necessarily found in a school domain. I therefore pose the question: What are the out of school literacy practices of a group of children with SLD? As a secondary question, I ask: What is the affective engagement with out of school literacy practices of these children with SLD

The research participants are six grade six learners with SLD. They are identified as the best readers and writers in their grade. I used a qualitative approach that included semi-structured interviews, observations and artefact collection. Data were categorised into two broad areas: the consumption and production of texts. From these, four themes emerged: [in relation to Book Reading] (1) the embodiment of reading practices, (2) the immense value of books, (3) the construction of family relationships and [in relation to Text Production and Design] (4) the construction of identity.

I found that despite being labelled as 'struggling' readers, these children derived immense pleasure from their out of school literacy practices, some of which had developed over time. Lasting relationships had formed between the children, the adults in their lives and texts. There was an interweaving of literacy practices with the translocal and global practices. The findings revealed the 'normality' of the children. I recommend that teachers draw on authentic home practices to expand school literacy practices meaningfully.

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

DoE	Department of Education
FP	Foundation Phase
FPS	Fielden Primary School
gr R	Reception year before grade one
HoD	Head of Department
IP	Intermediate Phase
LSEN	Learners with Special Educational Needs
MS	Mainstream
NLS	New Literacy Studies
SLD	Specific Learning Disability
UK	United Kingdom

## **DEDICATION**

For Ania Louw (née Godowski) - 27 July 2009

who lives on in her children,

Lydia and Arthur

and their many storybooks.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

### 1.1. General overview

How can Howard<sup>1</sup>, who attends a special school because he is a ‘struggling’ reader, navigate and subvert the conventions of comic design to produce a coherent, humorous comic strip? How is it possible that Busi<sup>2</sup>, who fails the annual Department of Education (DoE) grade three tests for literacy, can go to the local spaza<sup>3</sup> shop to buy a packet of crisps and then enter into a debate with the owner about brand names and incorrect change? In South Africa there are many such disparities between schooled literacy (as measured by DoE systemic tests) and the everyday literacy practices of children.

My interest is in learners who have special education needs (LSEN). Some of these children have been diagnosed with specific learning disabilities (SLD) as a result of, but not limited to, cerebral trauma, delayed development of milestones, a medical condition or a perceptual disorder. This may cause them to engage differently with literacy practices, from what is expected in mainstream schools (MS). At LSEN schools, access to the curriculum is supported by a variety of adaptations and adjustments. The most significant is smaller classes where greater individual attention can be given.

Despite all the adjustments and adaptations at school level, few children with SLD seem to be natural ‘readers’ and ‘writers’, as understood in the literature on emergent literacy (Clay, 1972; Teale & Sulzby, 1991). Comments from teachers that I have overheard at an LSEN school when referring to poor literacy ability include *‘These children will never read for pleasure, so it is better to show them the video of the story’*, *‘these children do not like to do tasks where they have to read the instructions’* *‘these children are never interested in reading, they are only interested in computers and their cell phones!’* Such comments allude simultaneously to the notions that literacy is not limited to school related tasks, and that non-school based practices are not seen as important in literacy learning. Alternative literacy practices (such as those involving computers and cell phones) are acknowledged only as contrasting activities to teachers’ literacy preferences for children - book reading.

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<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms to protect the identities of schools and participants.

<sup>2</sup> Fictional character

<sup>3</sup> An informal shop, usually run from a home to subsidise income and often found in informal settlements.

The teachers' comments also highlight the deficit positioning of the children. Children with SLD who have literacy barriers (so-called reading and writing problems) often attend LSEN schools as a result of an inability to manage the demands of the literacy curriculum at MS schools. LSEN schools therefore focus on literacy intervention programmes in order to prepare these children to return to a MS school or the world of work and study after school. Whilst focusing on such intervention programmes, attention is also drawn to these children's literacy incompetence. Children are thus always reminded of their 'inability'. In differentiated reading groups in the Foundation Phase (FP), children are divided into three groups (top, middle and bottom) and taught according to perceived ability. While these groups are often given neutral or impartial names (e.g. the Red group, the Blue group), children are not easily fooled. In my years of experience of teaching children to read, I have seen how quickly children recognise in which ability group they have been placed. Children are therefore acutely aware of the school's view of their literacy ability (or lack thereof). However, so called 'bottom group' children may engage in meaningful literacy practices at home and the school's view may therefore be very different to their own self-positioning. Due to schools' dominant position in society, these children may experience their out of school literacy practices lacking power in school settings. Thus, in one context (the school) children are seen as 'struggling' readers and writers, and in another context (the home) the same children may be seen as proficient readers and writers. Many teachers' perceptions of literacy are based exclusively on the child's ability and desire to read school books.

What then, counts as literacy? The dilemma of what counts as literacy depends on the lens through which the literacy practices are viewed and who the 'viewers' are. Street (2010) points out that what is not counted as literacy by some, may be acknowledged, understood and used as literacy by others. Street also foregrounds the power that one group may have to define for another group what should count as literacy:

'... from this perspective what counts as "literacy" depends crucially on who has the power to define "it"' (ibid: 206).

In the teachers' views expressed above, we see that one group, e.g. teachers, may view computer games as educational (or non-educational) time fillers, while the children may view these games as significant meaning making activities that harness an array of literacy practices and skills such as prediction, timing, game strategies, and interpretation of symbols. The child who is positioned as a 'struggling' reader at school may be highly proficient at reading the texts of computer games. Children in an LSEN school may be the most proficient

readers (and writers) in their grade but may not yet be ready for mainstream literacy demands. They are still seen as ‘struggling’ readers. Despite this, their out of school literacy practices may demonstrate a range of activities where reading and writing play a central role.

New literacy studies (NLS) addresses literacy from a sociocultural perspective. Researchers who base their research on NLS often use ethnographic methods, whereby the literacy phenomenon is studied as a situated, context embedded, social practice (*cf.* Heath, 1983; Gee, 1996; Street, 1995; 2003; 2004). NLS looks at literacy events and practices, how they fit (or do not fit) into various domains and how these literacy events and practices construct different identities for people. Mention is often made of the social power (or lack thereof) of literacy practices. Barton and Hamilton (1998) refer to dominant literacy practices that are supported by socially powerful institutions such as schools. The above-mentioned teachers’ comments therefore convey the perception that some literacy practices are preferred above others, e.g. it is preferable for children to be reading a book than to be participating in alternative practices such as computer games.

A number of studies have been conducted within a sociocultural framework on in-school and out of school literacy practices in the United Kingdom and North America, e.g. Gregory and William’s (2002) *City Literacies*, Hull and Schultz’s (2002) *School’s Out!*, Dyson’s (2003) *The brothers and sisters learn to write* and a variety of others. Pahl and Rowsell’s (2006) *Travel Notes from New Literacy Studies* not only includes research from the southern hemisphere but also draws attention to the interaction between local and global literacies. However, there is very little research on the out of school literacy practices of children in South Africa (*cf.* Prinsloo, 2004; Stein, 2008; Bizos, 2009) and there is a general dearth of research on the out of school literacy practices of children with specific learning disabilities, both locally and internationally.

In positioning children with SLD as readers and writers, I aim to make a contribution towards filling this gap by investigating the out of school literacy practices of children with SLD. Having taught in the LSEN environment for twenty-five years, I was curious to know more about these practices. This motivated me to put at the heart of this study the investigation of out of school literacy practices of children with SLD. The findings of this investigation are context dependent (like the social practice view of literacy) and can therefore not be generalised to any group of children with SLD. The findings may be useful for the teachers

of these children by illuminating what currently appears to be the uncharted domain of out of school literacy practices of these children. Knowledge of out of school literacy practices of children with SLD may help to further develop and strengthen existing literacy practices at LSEN schools.

As my initial search has shown that there is no empirical research in South Africa on out of school literacy practices of children with SLD, I therefore propose the following research question:

What are the out of school literacy practices of a group of children with specific learning disabilities attending a South African LSEN school?

As a secondary question, I ask:

What is the affective engagement with out of school literacy practices of these children with specific learning disabilities?

I answer these questions by conducting a case study of the out of school literacy practices of six children with SLD. The sample of participants is drawn from grade six children from across Cape Town who attend an LSEN school, Fielden Primary School (FPS).

## 1.2. Conclusion

This research explores the out of school literacy practices of a group of children with SLD, by firstly establishing what these literacy practices are and secondly exploring and analyzing the affective engagement of these children with out of school literacy practices. By using the NLS and emergent literacy theoretical framework, I reflect on empirical research on some out of school literacy practices in Chapter 2. The literature review is preceded by an overview of the consumption and design of text, two categories that I use in the analysis of literacy practices.

### 1.3. Chapter outline

#### CHAPTER 1: Introduction

#### CHAPTER 2: Theory and Literature Review

In this chapter I present New Literacy Studies and emergent literacy as the theoretical foundations of my research. I investigate empirical research on children's out of school literacy practices.

#### CHAPTER 3: Research Design and Methodology

In this chapter I discuss the case study, by addressing the sample group, the methods of data collection and the analysis of the data.

#### CHAPTER 4: Children as consumers of texts: Book reading.

This chapter is the first of two that present the findings from the study. I focus on three themes that emerged from the children's book reading practices: (1) the embodiment of reading practices as seen in the pleasure derived from, and rituals performed around book reading, (2) the immense value of books communicated to the children in their homes and (3) the construction of family relationships through book reading rituals. I argue that these themes demonstrate how children diagnosed with SLD construct themselves as aspirant readers.

#### CHAPTER 5: The construction of identity through the design and production of texts.

This chapter presents further data focusing on children's text production and design. I argue that the children construct their identities through their use, adaptation and subversion of textual design conventions.

#### CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

In this chapter I reflect on the findings and draw out implications for teachers of children with SLD.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Introduction

I begin by outlining the sociocultural approach to literacy that underpins this study and then move on to a discussion of aspects of emergent literacy that intersect with the sociocultural approach. While the sociocultural approach to literacy (brought to the fore by Street's *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (1984) and emergent literacy (a term introduced by Clay, 1972<sup>4</sup>), are not new approaches to the educational research arena, they both address theoretical foundations that are still relevant to literacy research in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### 2.2. Theoretical Framework

Brian Street (1995; 2003; 2004) has conceptualised different ways of understanding literacy and proposed two models: the autonomous and the ideological models. On the one hand the autonomous model of literacy conceptualizes literacy as a decontextualised and autonomous skill. It is associated with a view that people develop universal abilities to read all texts and produce different kinds of writing. On the other hand the ideological model of literacy is based on a sociocultural understanding of literacy. Here literacy is viewed as a context embedded social practice. Within this view reading and writing are linked to reading and writing particular kinds of texts in specific contexts.

In the autonomous model, literacy is seen and studied as separate from the social context, and direct consequences are linked to becoming literate, e.g. of being logical and objective within rational thinking. Literacy is associated with economic progress, social and political development and civilization (Street, 1995).

From an ideological viewpoint the technical aspects of reading and writing are not denied, as these are conceptualized as part of social practices (ibid 1995). This model therefore necessitates an ethnographic approach to the study of literacy and the understanding of specific literacy issues and problems within social contexts. Out of this model has risen the New Literacy Studies (NLS). (cf. Heath, 1983; Gee, 1996; Street, 1995; 2003; 2004.)

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'Emergent Literacy' was developed in Clay's unpublished doctoral dissertation in 1966 (Teale and Sulzby 1986: xviii).



Literacy can therefore be viewed from two angles. On the one hand, it is viewed as a set of universal skills which need to be mastered in order to execute any reading or writing task. It is traditionally understood that formal schooling is the preferred route for acquiring these skills. On the other hand, literacy is seen as a social practice: whether in-school or out of school, people engage in particular literacy practices which differ according to social contexts and purposes.

The ideological model emphasises the socialisation of literacy, highlighting literacy practices as socio-culturally embedded. It focuses on the things that people do with literacy in their everyday life, at home, work or in school (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005).

How can we describe literacy as a sociocultural activity? Razfar and Gutiérrez (2003) maintain that when focusing on the cultural activities of communities, the influence of these valued practices on learning and participation becomes visible and agree that,

in contrast to conceptions of literacy as the acquisition of a series of discrete skills, a sociocultural view of literacy argues that literacy learning cannot be abstracted from the cultural practices in which it is nested (2003:34).

Barton & Hamilton (1998) argue that literacy practices help us to understand the link between reading and writing and the social structures in which they are found and which they help shape. They give a straightforward definition of the literacy practice as ‘what people do with literacy’ (ibid 1998:3) or ‘cultural ways of utilising literacy’ (ibid 1998:7). Razfar and Gutiérrez (2003:35) refer to the interweaving of culture throughout all aspects of human development. Literacy practices will therefore vary according to different cultural contexts. There are numerous studies that have investigated literacy practices as part of wider social practices, e.g. literacy practices using the computer and information and communication technologies (ICT) at home and school (Snyder, 1998; Snyder *et al*, 2002; Warschauer *et al*, 2004) and the link between learning, literacy and video games (Gee, 2006; 2007).

Literacy practices are made up of different literacy events. In Street’s (2010:206) language of description for NLS, he defines literacy practices as referring to a collection of observable literacy events or to the meanings and values that are connected to literacy in a specific cultural context. A literacy event could be specific instances or enactments of literacy practices (Hamilton, 2000:16), which can be observed and recorded (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005:12). In Barton and Hamilton’s words, literacy events are ‘observable episodes which

arise from practices and are shaped by them.’ (1998:7). These literacy events could take the form of a variety of different activities where literacy has some function. An example of an observable literacy event is a child writing a Christmas wish list. This could be done by drawing pictures, using pre conventional spelling or compiling the list using the computer. This event arises from the literacy practice of making lists, such as “To-do lists” and shopping lists. Children draw on different literacy practices that they have experienced in their sociocultural environment and development in order to execute a literacy event.

Literacy practices with their accompanying literacy events take place in a specific space, the domain or ‘world where the literacy is practiced’ (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005:13). Some literacy practices are limited to a specific domain, such as certain church or religious rituals. In their discussion of the domains of literacy practices, Pahl and Rowsell mention the different identities that participants may construct for themselves as they engage in literacy events and practices while they negotiate their way across different literacy domains, e.g. the identity the participant takes on at the moment of writing a passionate appeal to a newspaper will differ from the identity used to complete a hire-purchase form. Not all domains are clear-cut (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Literacy practices spill over from one domain into another, such as school work that is done at home or school assemblies that follow a church ritual. We can summarise the language of description of NLS by saying that literacy events make up literacy practices, which are part of broader social practices and which take place in different domains.

Brandt and Clinton (2002) argue that the language of description used by NLS does not refer adequately to the transcontextual aspects of literacy events and literacy practices in different domains. This could be as result of applying an ethnographic approach that is tied to a specific place or location when investigating literacy as a situated and bounded phenomenon. In this type of investigation literacy data is collected, analysed and studied in the specific moment and space in which it takes place. We have learnt much from such research as it has brought about significant unveiling of literacy practices against the sociocultural background in which they take place, e.g. Street’s investigation of literacy practices in an Iranian village (Street, 1984). However, Brandt and Clinton (2002) contend that literacy events and practices do not stand alone within the local context, but are influenced by global practices and can similarly influence global practices. They pose the question:

Can we not see the ways that literacy arises out of local, particular, situated human interactions while also seeing how it also regularly arrives from other places – infiltrating, disjoining, and displacing local life? (2002:343).

Brandt and Clinton thus draw our attention to the fact that literacy events and practices are connected across contexts and argue that the local and global should be taken into consideration when investigating literacy events and practices. Kell (2009) maintains that while we cannot accurately determine what is global in literacy research, the understanding of the local from an ethnographic perspective assists us in determining what is ‘not-local’ (Kell’s term).

While Kell (2009) confirms the achievements of NLS, she draws attention to the transcontextual notion of literacy events whereby an event can encapsulate more than what can be observed at that specific moment. Kell’s explanation of the transcontextual is the movement of meaning across the contexts of literacy events and practices. She describes this as a flow of people, objects and information from one context to another. Knowledge of this movement helps us to understand how people, objects and information relate to each other across spaces and over time. This knowledge also helps researchers to make claims about literacy practices, by analysing and generalising what they find within the transcontextual flow. Kell discusses the argument presented by Bloome et al in which the literacy event is seen as space where people act creatively on their circumstances and where literacy is not merely positioned as a background notion.

Kell (ibid: 80) refers to Brandt and Clinton (2002) when she states that ‘the global reaches into the local’, but cautions against assigning a greater power value to global practices.

In Kell’s ethnographic investigation of the literacy practices in an informal settlement in Cape Town, she explored how meaning is carried across transcontextual situations by looking for meaning making trajectories that show the flow of practices and data that linked events. Events were therefore not analysed as single moments in time, but as part of transcontextual sequences ‘unfolding over space and time’ (ibid: 87).

Baynham and Prinsloo (2009:12) use the term translocal for ‘the evidence that the local exists in a networked global world’ and state that this perspective ‘raises questions of the processes by which texts are produced and consumed across contexts and localities’. Electronic media, digital literacies, social networking and the multimodal application encountered in everyday

literacies are some aspects that highlight the concepts of space and time in the translocal dynamics of literacy events. An example of the translocal can be seen where children use the Internet for comic design ideas and then share their designs on a social network space. In this case children draw from a wider popular youth culture that has infiltrated their literacy practices and spaces. At the same time their designs may influence spaces shared with others. The shortcomings of the NLS language of description can be addressed in some way by adding a translocal (Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009) and transcontextual (Kell 2009) perspective when analysing literacy events and practices across space and time.

For the purposes of my study it is important to take into account the emergent literacy paradigm (Clay, 1972; Teale & Sulzby, 1991) which I connect with out of school literacy practices. Emergent literacy practices provide artefacts and evidence of literacy engagement from a time in a child's life when they are not yet formally regulated by school practices. (Young children may however be influenced by school-type practices of older siblings.) These artefacts display the child's pre-conventional reading and writing practices. Teale and Sulzby (ibid: viii) point out that before emergent literacy developed as an area of study 'the general belief was that literacy development did not begin until the child encountered formal instruction in school'. Children's literacy practices before entering school were thus largely ignored. In literate environments, emergent literacy can be observed before any formal schooling has taken place. Children apply and re-enact the processes and practices that they observe in their literate environment. In this way they show that they have an understanding about reading and writing practices and its forms and functions, despite not having had formal schooling. These activities include pretend reading and writing and pre-conventional writing in the form of scribbling, drawing or phonetic spelling.

Writing in the UK context, Kress (1997) highlights that children may not make clear distinctions between drawing and writing. Kress argues that children start as pictographers when they want to communicate meaning on paper. Working within the emergent literacy paradigm, Ferreiro (1984:100) uses the word 'invent' and says that there is 'more at work than immature minds in isolation' in children's early attempts at writing. Regardless of the non-traditional appearance of the writing, the activity always has meaning for the child. These not yet conventional ways in which children read and write precede and develop into conventional schooled literacy.

In the field of emergent literacy the words ‘not yet conventional’, ‘pre-conventional’ or ‘invent’ signify a literacy process and literacy practices that appear to correspond with the sentiments of ‘non-traditionally’ understood, socially embedded literacy practices as described in NLS, e.g. graffiti, video games or text messaging. Like many studies of literacy practices investigated in NLS, emergent literacy practices are also closely linked to out of school literacy practices.

Although the inclusion of emergent literacy in the theoretical framework of this research serves to highlight the often unconventional appearance of out of school practices, Wilson and Lonigan also draw attention to the fact that ‘researchers have increased their focus on emergent literacy in an attempt to identify children who may be at risk for later reading difficulty, potentially eliminating this risk before children begin elementary school’ (Wilson & Lonigan, 2009:116). I therefore explore the emergent literacy practices of the participants in my study retrospectively through conducting literacy histories and historical artefact collection.

By investigating the literacy practices of these relatively new participants (0-6 year olds) in the literacy field, emergent literacy research stops at the point where most other research on literacy practices begins, covering areas of out of school literacy research that have not been previously addressed (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). I draw on the emergent literacy paradigm in order to position the children in this study as readers and writers before they enter formal school. While emergent literacy focuses on pre-school activities, NLS include literacy practices from pre-school right through the schooling years and beyond.

I argue that it is this intersection of NLS and emergent literacy that holds part of the key to understanding the out of school literacy practices of children. It is my view that children do not stop engaging in the ‘unconventional’ once they are enrolled at school. Children creatively transfer literacy practices from one domain to the other. The pre-conventional features of children’s emergent literacy practices will therefore continue once they enter school, but these features are more likely to be observed in their unconventional out of school literacy practices than in their school practices. The theoretical framework of this investigation is therefore based on NLS and emergent literacy.

### 2.3. Literature review

In order to establish a reference point for what counts as out of school literacy practices I examine empirical research on these practices, their effects on participants and the ways in which these practices are perceived by both researcher and participant. This research has assisted with my identification and subsequent analysis of out of school literacy practices of children with SLD. In this section of the chapter I discuss examples of out of school literacy practices such as book reading at home, digital literacies and comic book reading and design. I precede this discussion on out of school literacy practices with an overview of the consumption and design of literacy, two categories I use in the identification and analysis of the participants' out of school literacy practices.

#### 2.3.1. Consumption and production of literacy

For the purpose of this investigation I have classified literacy practices into two broad categories; the practice of consumption, e.g. reading a book, and the production or design of literacy artefacts, e.g. story writing. However, I use these categories mindful of their limitations. I am aware of the fact that the different facets of reading and writing cannot be juxtaposed and compared as if these two literacy practices lie on the opposite ends of a continuum. Goodman (1986:10) reminds us that through research 'it becomes apparent that writing and reading are not mirror images of each other'; there are similarities and differences in these two practices with the one impacting on the other. Here we can refer to the writing of a text with the simultaneous reading and re-reading (aloud or silently) of the same text for editing purposes.

It is also not accurate to define book reading as a passive process and the writing of a story as an active process. Reading may appear as the passive consumption of texts when compared to the more active process of using a pencil to produce texts through drawing, writing or designing. In Connell's (2008: 109) discussion of Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading, we understand that meaning making in the reading process is as a result of the transaction between the reader and the text. This process consists of many actions between the reader and the text and involves the reader's 'personal, social, linguistic, and cultural history'. She contends that

crucial to the transactional perspective is that engagement with and personal response to a text are the starting point of a literary experience and the construction of meaning (Connell, 2008:109).

Connell also refers to the interplay between the reader's interpretation of the text and the author's intention with the text. It is this engagement with the text together with the personal response to a text that make of reading an active and dynamic process. The reader draws on his/her own and others' socio-cultural knowledge and experience in order to make meaning of the text. Within the consumption of a text we therefore find a production or design process, i.e. the construction of meaning. Meaning becomes a product of the interaction between the text and the reader (Galda & Liang, 2003:269). A reader could therefore also be classified as a producer, albeit a producer of a more abstract aspect of text and not necessarily the producer of a concrete product such as a page of written text.

For the purpose of the data analyses later in this research I make a distinction between literacy practices where text is produced in a concrete format (designs, drawings and comic strips) and those literacy practices where text is consumed in the form of reading of texts. This is possibly an oversimplified distinction between the two literacy practices, but is practical for the purposes of this investigation. I now continue by addressing some out of school literacy practices from these two categorisations, consumption and design.

### 2.3.2. Out of school literacy practices

Barton and Hamilton (1998:13) point out that literacy can become a community resource and as such 'families, local communities and organisations regulate and are regulated by literacy practices'. This would not be possible unless the participants reflect on and, where necessary, change or adapt their literacy practices, e.g. children deciding to keep, pass on or discard their first (baby) books. School literacy practices, such as decoding a passage using the phonics method, do not usually expect children to reflect on their practices. The notion of reflection thus becomes an indicator for the identification of out of school literacy practices.

Out of school literacy practices are not always restricted to physical outside of school spaces, but can also take place within the spaces and physical boundaries of the school grounds. Maybin's (2007) study on in school and out of school literacy practices illustrates the heterogeneous configuration of a classroom space where official (usually linked with the

school setting) and unofficial (usually linked with home or vernacular setting) literacy activities swap roles, interact with each other and even run parallel to each other, e.g. a science experiment where the children extended their experimentation beyond the ambit of the task set by the teacher, and added their own experiments. Lenters' (2007) study refers to literacy practices that extend from within the family at home to peers at school, e.g. discussing novels read at home with peers at school. The use of out of school literacy practices in school shows that 'the division between 'vernacular' and 'schooled' is not as clear-cut as is sometimes assumed' (Maybin, 2007:515). This gives rise to two further features of out of school literacy practices: these practices may take place in an informal setting (as opposed to in school) and they may be found in both the school and the home domain. This is evidence of the overlapping of the two domains, showing a blurring of boundaries between the two domains.

#### 2.3.2.1. Book reading in the home

There has been much research on the importance of book reading to young children and its role in developing pre-reading skills. According to Sulzby (1985), children's participatory role in book reading aids literacy development. Teale (1986:197) speaks of book reading that has an 'extremely facilitative effect on children's emergent literacy abilities'. Hood *et al* (2008:266) found that children who received literacy teaching from their parents, such as letter based activities, had a more developed vocabulary which they argue is 'more important to subsequent literacy development than parent-child reading'. They do, however, point out that shared reading practices between parent and child 'should not be dismissed in favor of formal teaching practices'. Stephenson *et al* (2008:44) concur with this, but point out that some direct teaching activities may happen simultaneously with storybook reading at home. The critique implied here is that there is not only one 'middle class way' of exposing young children to literacy, such as shared book reading. Mui and Anderson (2008) found that the parents in their case study of home literacy practices provided a literacy-rich home environment (labelled boxes, sticky-notes and memos on walls), without necessarily engaging in book reading practices. Reading in this home was only used for functional purposes, e.g. for recipes or school homework and not enjoyed as reading for pleasure. Yet the children from this home were top students in their class at school.



I have found at the heart of these studies an emphasis on successful acquisition of literacy skills. This can be seen in the terms used by researchers or the descriptors I used to summarise their findings, e.g. 'developing pre-reading skills', 'literacy abilities', 'reading outcomes', 'direct teaching', 'top students', 'a child's future', 'deficiencies', 'reading failure' and 'literacy development'. Book reading is portrayed as a precursor to successful literacy skill acquisition – a type of autonomous view of literacy. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) describe the well-known middle class practice (like Heath (1982) in her bed-time story ritual) of the shared parent-child story book reading that 'speaks of love, the importance of the family unit, and parental commitment to a child's future' (ibid 1998:848). Yet these studies do not explore the role of book reading in building family relationships, the real heart in shared book reading practices. The social practices that involve family relationships and children's affective engagement with book reading thus seem to be largely ignored. I draw attention to the importance of the family unit in book reading. The family unit can be highlighted as a literacy sanctuary for many middle class children. This is where they can embrace book reading practices with parents and siblings. Within middle class family units they can shape their love of books and form lasting memories of shared family relationships.

Book reading is a literacy practice in many middle class homes but might not be a widespread family practice in low-income homes (Teale, 1986) or may be an unfamiliar practice in cultures with strong oral story-telling practices<sup>5</sup> (Mui & Anderson, 2008). Heath (1982) refers to the bedtime story as a familiar literacy event or ritual of middle class pre-schoolers, but links it with future behavior patterns of children and adults.

The bedtime story is a major literacy event that helps set patterns of behaviour that occur repeatedly throughout life of mainstream children and adults (ibid: 319).

Some of these middle class storybook reading patterns are later echoed at school where children need to demonstrate similar skills in reading lessons. Heath calls this the 'school way of doing things' (ibid: 323). Many parents emulate in their homes what they have experienced in school themselves. These 'school ways' are also brought into the home by siblings who are at school, the media and advertising. Parents can even be placed under pressure to purchase and use toys and books for their babies in order to become the 'good parent' and make their offspring 'school ready' (Nichols *et al*, 2009:67), or to prepare their

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<sup>5</sup> Oral story-telling practices may also construct family relationships, but this is beyond the ambit of my study.

children for school (Mui & Anderson, 2008) and give them a head start with ‘school ways of doing things’ – a type of prevention of future literacy or schooling problems.

In contrast to the above studies, Taylor (1983) refers to her response to literacy research in her preface to *Family Literacies*:

I had become uncomfortably conscious that we were creating learning environments for children where reading and writing were presented as decontextualised language skills largely unconnected to reading and writing in everyday life (ibid: xii).

She refers to the sharing and use of print in families. For parents and children this sharing mediates their relationships and amongst others, siblings and friends use print to form social networks. Although Taylor also addresses the skills of reading and writing, she does so through the practices and relationships within families. In a later work Taylor (1986: 141) also refers to shared parent-child book reading as an intimate occasion whereby even natural observations for research purposes could be intrusive and could impose restraints on this family literacy practice. Taylor depicts book reading as one of the aspects that can forge relationships in families. While Taylor’s research was conducted a while ago, it is still very relevant. I use Taylor’s work as it is one of the most comprehensive studies, conducted over three years, on the role literacy plays in the construction of family relationships. In one instance she mentions magazine subscriptions that are given to children as birthday gifts, analyzing how links are forged within families through such practices. The children and their family members become part of a global popular culture through (1) the giving of magazine subscriptions and (2) the content of the magazines. Although not defined as such by Taylor, this is an example of the translocal playing a role in literacy events.

The emergence of embodied practices around shared book reading activities in families is a further aspect of shared book reading that is mentioned by Taylor (1983). Taylor describes the daily routine or ritual of bedtime stories still enjoyed by a nine-year old child, where the parent gets into the bed with the child and the two are propped up by pillows as they share stories (ibid 1983:31). The embodied practices around shared book reading portray literacy as a social practice involving family relationships and pleasure. In contrast, these practices may lack social power in the formal or in-school setting.

The Family Treasures™ project (Bruce, 1997:190) describes how children bring objects<sup>6</sup> from home to inform others about ‘their family, their community, their country, their world’. One example of heirlooms and photographs from home had ‘stories attached to it’ (ibid: 190) that generated a literacy event at school – describing the importance of much-loved objects from home. Some of these stories were told by children and adults who found that they now had an opportunity to take part in a literacy practice that they would otherwise have avoided. This way of viewing literacy events and practices helps us to understand that literacy is a social practice, not always bound to the development or assessments of skills. Literacy practices such as these may therefore be pursued by both proficient readers and ‘at risk’ readers.

#### 2.3.2.2. Multimodality and children as designers

Multimodality, defined as the use of more than one communicative mode in a text, e.g. visual images, written text, lay-out, sound and/or texture, has become an integral part of the semiotic landscape (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). This can be observed not only in newspapers, books and advertisements (paper based and electronic), but also in electronic communications equipment such as mobile phones, global positioning devices and computers. Kress (2000) has argued that all texts are multimodal.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) draw our attention to the prominence of images and illustrations in the initial years of schooling. After the first few years of schooling these disappear from children’s in-school own production of texts as well as the texts they are expected to read. It is generally assumed that non-readers need illustrations instead of words resulting in visual literacy being less important later on in the education system (Millard & Marsh, 2001). However, both children and adults encounter images outside the school setting (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996:15). This is an indication that out of school literacy practices may be encountered in practices where images play a role together with the written word, often with a de-emphasis of text and a preference for images. These practices are unconventional when compared to schooled literacy practices later in life.

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<sup>6</sup> The children could bring drawings or photographs if the objects were too big.

Kress (1997:8) also points out that before young children learn to read and write, they ‘come as thoroughly experienced makers of meaning, as experienced makers of signs in any medium that is to hand’. Kress refers to a ‘multiplicity of ways in which children make meaning, and the multiplicity of modes, means, materials which they employ in doing so’ (ibid 1997:96). This may include the multiple engagements of different writing tools, different surfaces, blocks and boxes. I have observed how children add sounds or noises as they draw pictures. These sounds are not recorded within the drawing. They are lost after they have been uttered, but they are used by children to convey meaning. The multiple engagement that children have with different design materials allows them to treat print as multimodal. A child may paste a shape onto a page and refer to it as their writing, e.g. cutting out a red ‘lollipop’ shape and saying they ‘wrote the word stop’. The child may point to a stop sign in the road, make a screeching noise and say: ‘It says stop’.

Kress (1997:97) explains children’s multimodal perspective on alphabetic writing, amongst others as blocks of print, letter-shapes, media and ‘an aesthetic object which can be used in a design’. Children do not cease to experiment with multimodal design after they enter school with its dominant, less multimodal literacy practices. It therefore follows that children’s out of school artefacts where, for instance a ‘graffiti’ font is used for writing, may appear unconventional in a school setting where mostly conventional alphabetic shapes are used.

#### 2.3.2.3. Digital literacy and design

Peppler and Kafai (2007) conducted an interesting study on creative production in the digital domain. The study is based ‘on three years of ethnographic observations in a Computer Clubhouse located in the midst of an immigrant and economically depressed neighbourhood in South Central Los Angeles, USA’ (ibid 2007:150). Peppler and Kafai (2007) refer to the informal out-of-school spaces where youth go in order to explore creative production using amongst others computer programming, video games, music videos, and digital art. According to Peppler and Kafai the youth dominated these spaces of creative production, even though they have seldom received formal instruction in these worlds. This demonstrates that literacy practices are not bound by specific domains. Here I highlight one of the critiques of NLS, where literacy practices are studied as local phenomena. Whilst the research describes the literacy practice and how it manifests itself in a specific situation, the practices are not bound by the situation in which they were first encountered or studied.

Digital design can be utilised by professional designers in the formal setting of a publishing house, and at the same time it can be applied by youth in the informal setting of a clubhouse. Digital design as a literacy practice can, as many other out of school literacy practices, therefore take place in informal settings and across different domains. Digital design lends itself to intertextuality, e.g. through digital ‘cutting and pasting’ from a variety of sources. This makes digital design as a literacy practice more liable to cross over into other domains and become translocal.

Peppler and Kafai (2007) also claim that one of the benefits of informal digital learning spaces for youth is that they spend long stretches of time exploring their interests, in some cases uninterrupted. I view the apparent lack of time constraints on this specific out of school literacy practice as one of the marked differences between in-school and out of school literacy practices in general. Time spent on in-school literacy practices is often limited to the time allocated in school to do these activities or the time allowed to complete activities out of school before returning the final product to school. Out of school literacy practices do not have “due dates” as understood by in-school practices and are often not restricted by time limits. In addition, these types of literacy practices can also take place without adult supervision, e.g. children using computers to create multimodal designs that include text, graphics, music and animation.

There also appears an ease with which young children access and use the different multimodal aspects of digital literacies. Kress (2003:174) watched boys playing a Playstation game that involved visual images, music, dialogue and writing whilst manipulating the controls. He found that the boys did not use ‘school’ reading skills but reading skills they were more likely to encounter later in their lives. In this case ‘school’ reading skills, such as sounding out a word phonetically, play a minimal role in the participation of computer games. Out of school literacy practices could therefore also be identified by the skills used that are different to those taught or acknowledged at school.

#### 2.3.2.4. Comic book reading

Multimodality is not restricted to the conventional linear way of presenting data, where texts are interspersed with images. Schwartz and Rubinstein-Avilla (2006) confirmed this in their

research of cartoon reading (specifically manga<sup>7</sup> type cartoons) by American youth. Despite controversy about the value of manga comics, Schwartz and Rubinstein-Avilla report that ‘some public librarians are rejoicing because they are unable to keep manga on the shelves’ (ibid 2006:40). They found that readers of these cartoons may have to negotiate the following within the same story: different font types, visual cues, expressions on faces, alternative use of Japanese and Chinese written characters together with English words, right to left, left to right and horizontal presentation of the text that have been utilised to represent the narrative.

Schwartz & Rubinstein-Avilla (ibid: 42) argue that ‘ultimately, like any cultural texts, manga provides a way for youths to negotiate alternative identities’. Here we see how unconventional literacy practices (when compared to conventional school literacy practices) open up different literacy domains, allowing participants to take on different identities. In this instance, these unconventional ways of representing and identifying with literacy, link out of school literacy practices with the unconventional ways of emergent literacy. Looking for the multimodal, the unconventional and negotiated identities in literacy practices may therefore be useful in analysing an out of school literacy practice.

Comic book reading has been debated as unsuitable reading material for decades (Lenters, 2007). Much of the controversy about comics stems from the fact that it is a hybrid genre, or as Groensteen (2000:35) defines it, ‘the result of crossbreeding between text and image’, which is similar to the genre of film. There are many studies on the negative aspects of children as consumers or readers of comic books. Parents often see comics as a waste of time (Norton, 2003) and adults are concerned about the consequences that comic language and images may have on children’s reading choices (Millard & Marsh, 2001).

On the other hand comics have been connected to academic skills, as they seem to captivate children (Bitz, 2004). Bitz claims that children had a better understanding of the writing process when they were allowed to create their own comics. There also appears to be some indication that struggling readers can benefit from comic reading. Moffat and Norton (2005:3) refer to Krashen’s description of Archie comics as ‘a useful tool for reluctant

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<sup>7</sup> Manga’ is the Japanese term for ‘amusing drawings’. It originated in Japan where it appears as printed comics in graphic-novel format, usually in black and white and covers a variety of topics, e.g. sport, finance and tax guidelines.

readers and second language readers'. While comic reading may be perceived as easy (Helsby, 2005), successful comic reading or design lies in an understanding of the many conventions that are found in this genre. Greany's (1980:354) study on leisure time reading found that although comics may have a limited vocabulary, the reading of comics needs a certain level of reading competence and that participants with low reading scores spent relatively little time reading books or comics. There is therefore much controversy on whether comic book reading is suitable for either proficient or reluctant readers.

### 2.3.3. Specific learning disability and literacy practices

There is a dearth of research on the out-of school literacy practices of primary school children with SLD. Yet many studies have been done on the importance of shared book reading<sup>8</sup> at home, particularly in the pre-school years and its role in intervention or prevention of later reading problems (Hood et al 2008; McCormick & Mason 1986; Sénéchal *et al*, 1996; Snow & Ninio, 1986; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). A North American study investigated the out of school activities of sixty so-called struggling, adolescent readers (Alvermann *et al*, 2007). Despite being labeled as 'at risk' readers, the participants considered themselves readers 'in out of school activities that offered choices and seemed relevant to their everyday literacy practices' (ibid: 33). Examples of such activities were Internet searching, reading song lyrics online, advertisements and problem solving (non-print) in video-gaming. It appears that these 'struggling' adolescents have constructed for themselves identities as readers in a different domain. They may have been labeled as 'struggling' in the school domain, but they were highly computer literate.

Worthy (1996) found that the book choices of reluctant readers are often not found in school libraries, e.g. speciality magazines (video games), comic books and cartoons. Due to a lack of interesting school materials 'young adolescents may not be able to reconcile school reading and writing with their out-of-school reading and writing' (Ivey & Broaddus 2001:

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<sup>8</sup> Shared book reading out of school, where parents or caregivers read a story for enjoyment with the child, differs from shared reading as a Reading requirement in the Foundation Phase as identified in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS). Teachers use a single enlarged text for the first fifteen minutes of the reading lesson. During this exercise children are introduced to a variety of genres. Each session commences with the enjoyment of the text and has 'a learning focus from the following: *concepts of print, text features, phonics, language patterns, word identification strategies and comprehensions at a range of levels . . .*' (Department of Basic Education 2010:14 - italics in original text).

354). Here we are again reminded of 'school' types of literacy practices that could possibly be less authentic than everyday literacy practices and therefore less appealing to children.

The thrust of this study is to investigate out of school literacy practices of children with SLD and not the associative factors of SLD. However, I will keep in mind that the learning disabilities of these children may provide a different hue to the overall background against which these practices take place.

## 2.4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the autonomous and ideological models of literacy. According to these two views, literacy can be seen as a decontextualised, autonomous skill or a context embedded social practice, respectively. The ideological model of literacy has provided the background against which NLS evolved. Whilst still acknowledging the skills needed to read and write particular texts, NLS focuses on literacy as a sociocultural practice. I find that according to an autonomous model of literacy, a reader can be labeled as 'struggling' because they have not yet mastered the literacy skills. Yet, the same reader, when viewed from the ideological model of literacy can be seen as a proficient reader and an unconventional creative designer.

In the NLS language of description the terms literacy events, literacy practices, domains and identity are used. Literacy events (making a shopping list) are part of broader literacy practices (making lists). These events and practices take place in various domains, but are not bound to domains, e.g. a novel read for pleasure at home that is discussed at school. As people engage in literacy events and practices, they negotiate identities for themselves, e.g. the pre-school child who becomes a 'reader' through the navigation of icons on a computer screen. I have found that the language of description as used in NLS is limited to the description of literacy events, practices, domains and identity construction. It does not offer the option to look at the role of literacy in social processes that develop over time and space, such as literacy and family relationships.

Brandt and Clinton (2002) in their critique on NLS, emphasised that literacy events and practices do not stand alone as local practices, but are influenced by global practices. They refer to the 'heavy hand that literacy has had in building networks across space and time'



(Brandt and Clinton, 2002: 347). Kell (2009) picks up on the space and time notion by expanding on the movement of transcontextual elements in literacy practices. This movement highlights what is 'not local' and gives us a better understanding of the processes involved in literacy practices. Baynham and Prinsloo's (2009) term, translocal, also refers to these processes across contexts and localities. I draw on these more recent ideas in NLS in my own analysis.

I have discussed emergent literacy as seen in the non-conventional reading and writing of young children. Emergent literacy has been added to the theoretical framework of this research as its 'not yet conventional' literacy practices intersect with the unconventional literacy practices of NLS. I argue that these 'not yet conventional practices' are continued by children once they enter school, but are more likely located in unconventional out of school literacy practices.

In this chapter I have also discussed research on a variety of out of school literacy practices. These practices range from book reading at home, multimodality and children as designers, digital literacy and design and comic book reading. Certain features<sup>9</sup> of out of school literacy practices emerged from this discussion. These features may facilitate the identification of out of school literacy practices. In the following chapter I will discuss the methodology used to collect data on the out of school practices of the children with SLD in the case study.

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 1 for a list of the features

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1.Introduction**

This research took the form of a qualitative case study, using a school as the source for the participants, and not as the focus of the research. In this chapter I discuss the general research design; the background to the case study; the sample group; the process of investigation, including the data collection strategies and the methods used in the data analysis.

### **3.2.General Research Design**

I decided to use a case study approach to the research for two reasons. Firstly, it gave me the opportunity to conduct a detailed investigation of out of school literacy practices of children diagnosed with SLD. Knobel and Lankshear (1999:95) define a case study as an ‘intensive (in depth and detailed) study of a bounded, contemporary phenomenon’. As the focus of this case study is the investigation of the out of school literacy practices of six grade 6 children, diagnosed with SLD, the real life phenomenon in this case study is therefore the out of school reading and writing practices of these children.

Secondly, a case study approach provides narrative practices that inform the research process. I particularly enjoy analysing children’s narratives and found that these narratives help me to put together ‘the case’. Dyson and Genishi (2005:112) state that ‘weaving together the contextual threads so that a quilt of persuasive images – a coherent narrative – emerges is the goal of case study researchers’. My goal with this research was therefore to weave together a description and explanation of the out of school literacies of a section of the South African school population that hitherto has been largely ignored.

Whilst there may be elements of an ethnographic approach in the research design, I do not claim that this is an ethnographic investigation of out of school literacies. The most pertinent features of an ethnographic approach to my research can be seen in the real life, authentic data that is collected and analysed and my interpretation of observations, based on the theoretical perspectives of NLS, the emergent literacy paradigm and multimodality. Lillis

and McKinney (2003:139) state that researchers should take cognizance of their theoretical viewpoints and should incorporate these into the interpretation of their case study data.

This is a small-scale case study, with participants drawn from a specific context, a school for learners with special education needs (LSEN) - Fielden Primary School (FPS). The specific LSEN setting and limited number of participants provide the background and boundaries of this research. This 'boundedness' therefore disallows for the generalisation of findings from this study. Nevertheless, the resultant findings and themes may be used to explore the relevance of the language of description of NLS in the research arena of out of school literacy practices of children diagnosed with SLD.

Throughout the design of this case study I combined the theoretical resources of NLS and emergent literacy with the personal experience I have gained in the field of teaching children with specific learning disabilities. Dyson and Genishi (2005:81) refer not only to the theoretical commitments but also to the personal and professional experiences that influence a research project. I was therefore mindful of the challenges with setting up suitable conditions in which to conduct research and work with children with barriers to learning. These challenges have resulted in a more in-depth discussion around the methodology and research design. In the following section I present the background to the research.

### 3.3. Background to the research

The majority of schools in South Africa are not inclusive as they are not able to accommodate children with barriers to learning. Children with special needs are accommodated in a number of LSEN schools<sup>10</sup> across the country. The children in this research have been placed at FPS as a result of a barrier to learning. FPS was thus used as the source to gain access to children who are diagnosed with SLD.

For the purpose of this case study the variables had to be minimized in order to find a group that is as homogenous as possible in terms of their primary learning barrier, literacy ability, mobility and ability to participate in an interview. Children with SLD as their primary learning barrier therefore presented as the most homogenous group in terms of the criteria

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<sup>10</sup> In 2007 there were 400 LSEN school in South Africa. Available online at <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutsa/education.htm>

required. The children's personal files and the CEMIS<sup>11</sup> database were consulted to verify the SLD diagnosis.

FPS is not a community school<sup>12</sup>. The most centralized, although not the most ideal, venue for interviews was the school. Since this investigation is about out of school literacy practices, I felt that an out of school venue would be more suitable. As this was not a practical solution, I opted for a combination of the two ideas: in school, yet out of the classroom. Therefore I decided on the boardroom with its large oval table and upholstered swivel chairs, as a venue for the initial group interviews. This room is called the Upper Boardroom. It is on the first floor in the only building in the school that has two storeys<sup>13</sup>. The ground floor houses the psychologists' rooms, a play therapy room and a group teaching room – places where children go only by invitation. It is usually a great privilege for a child to be allowed upstairs to the Upper Boardroom. Admission to this room raised the excitement of the children. It set the investigation a step apart from the usual therapy session and situated it as something unusual or special.

### 3.4. Sample group

I have drawn a purposive sample of six children from grade 6 at FPS. The small group allows for an in depth case study rather than a broad overview. The boundaries of this research were set as follows: the children must be in grade 6, have SLD as a primary barrier to learning, be the best readers and writers in their grade and be taught in English<sup>14</sup>. I have not used age and gender as criteria for the sample group.

I chose grade 6 children as they have completed at least five years of formal schooling and have basic reading and writing proficiency. Six children in a group seemed to be the ideal number for good group dynamics. With fewer children a lack of confidence in one child may be more apparent, minimizing participation. Many children at FPS are hyperactive or have attention deficit. These barriers to learning are not managed successfully in larger groups.

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<sup>11</sup> The learning barriers of every child, (LSEN or MS), are captured on this national database.

<sup>12</sup> Children at FPS live in a 25km radius from the school and are dependent on school buses or lift clubs.

<sup>13</sup> No classes use this area as the steps make it inaccessible for wheelchairs and walking aids.

<sup>14</sup> English was chosen as the language for the interviews and group work. The sampling was therefore not according to home language (HL), but according to the language of learning and teaching (LoLT). The LoLT at FPS is English. There were no discrepancies between the HL and LoLT of the six participants.

There were five boys (Daniel, Quinton, Richard, Howard and Isaaq) and one girl (Elsie) in the group. Elsie and Isaaq are in the same class and Daniel, Quinton, Richard and Howard are in the other class. All these children come from middle-class homes. A closer look at the children, their family composition and parents' occupations provided further background information against which their out of school literacy practices were investigated. I developed snapshots<sup>15</sup> from information from the children's files, teachers' reports and my observations throughout the research process.

### 3.5.Process of investigation

A broad outline of the research was given to the school principal. This was received with interest and enthusiasm. This session was followed up with the signing of consent forms. The investigation was explained to the primary school deputy principal, the Intermediate Phase (IP) Head of Department (HoD) and the three grade 6 teachers.

A general overview was given to each grade six class where I explained concepts such as consent forms and confidentiality. The children were informed that participants from each class would be chosen according to specific criteria, and that the teacher would make the choice, not the researcher. The teachers reported that the run-up to the introductory interview stimulated much discussion amongst the children. The children who were not chosen did not object audibly nor did they complain later to the teachers that they were overlooked<sup>16</sup>. All the children and their parents signed consent forms and agreed to the requirements set out in these forms.

### 3.6.Data collection

Data collection included interviews, observations and artefacts of the current and emergent literacy practices of the children. Whilst current literacy practices were investigated together with the children in a type of 'show and tell' method of their existing practices, emergent literacy practices were reconstructed (with or without artefacts) together with the children from their memories of text engagement.

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 2 for a snapshot of each participant.

<sup>16</sup> The children are familiar with daily small group extractions from a class for sessions with therapists or students, e.g. children with ASD may attend social skills sessions with a speech therapist.

Data was collected by using the following data collection strategies:

- An introductory session to the research with the three Grade 6 teachers and the IP HoD.
- A pre-investigation feedback session with two of the Grade 6 teachers with the stronger literacy classes<sup>17</sup>.
- Three semi-structured group interviews with the children as follows:
  1. Introduction and general discussion of out of school literacy practices, such as reading and writing activities – 60 minutes (See Appendix 3).
  2. Discussion of current literacy practices and artefacts, with emphasis on literacy activities other than school homework – 75 minutes (See Appendix 4).
  3. Discussion of emergent literacy practices and artefacts together with the reconstruction of emergent literacy events – 44 minutes (See Appendix 5).
- Semi structured individual interviews with the children for further discussions and follow-up on areas that were not covered in group discussions. These lasted between eight and eighteen minutes (See Appendix 6).
- Telephonic interviews with the children for further information.
- Observations during leisure activities and at break time.
- Observations during a holiday activity session.
- Collection of artefacts: physical artefacts and photographs
- Informal discussions with teachers and parents or grandparents.
- Information from the school librarian and library database.

Group and individual interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format resulting in nine sessions – three group interviews and six individual interviews. These interviews were recorded and transcribed. Observations during interviews were noted in field notes. Further individual discussions or telephonic interviews were added to the field notes. The first two group interviews took place over three days during the last two weeks of the second term (31 May to 9 June) after mid-year assessment for the day had been completed<sup>18</sup>. The third group interview session and the individual interviews took place during the school holidays in a five-hour morning session on 11 June 2010 from 7:30 to 12:30. This session included

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<sup>17</sup> The grade six children were streamed into three classes: two classes with the better readers and writers and one class with less proficient reading and writing ability.

<sup>18</sup> At the end of these assessment days the children were given 'free time' or were supervised outside

creative activities and time in the computer room. The children's affect was observed and noted at all times, e.g. eagerness to come to the interviews or attend the holiday session.

The first two group interview sessions took place around the boardroom table with the children seated on plastic chairs, which replaced the usual swivel chairs<sup>19</sup>. The third group interview and individual interviews took place in the school library and media centre during the school holidays. The open-plan library is housed in a converted Victorian house. I chose this venue for its lovely ambience, with its telltale smell of books and slight mustiness of well-loved stories, encyclopedias and classic tales. The leaded glass sash windows allow plenty of bright light streaming into the reading spaces. Here again the venue linked well with out of school literacy practices and had the desired effect. Not only were the children now in a place that they liked, but they were also in a time-zone that they liked, school holidays, doing activities that they liked or talking about literacy practices that they liked.

It is important to note that initial questions<sup>20</sup> were based on the broader concept of literacy (Lenters, 2007: 131-132), e.g. 'What do you do with your pens and pencils when you are not doing school work?', or 'What do you read when you are not reading school work?' These questions enabled the children to discuss literacy practices that lie outside the parameters of traditionally understood reading and writing activities, such as cartoons, comics and graffiti.

The investigation of out of school literacy practices lends itself to artefact collection, e.g. drawings, designs, story writing, book collections and photographs. I included photographs as artefacts, following Hamilton's (1998) study using photographs to explore literacy practices. Artefacts were therefore considered equally important to the data gained through interviews and observations of the children who are part of this case study.

The children were encouraged to use the available technology to take photographs of their out of school literacy practices. All the children had access to a digital or phone camera and a computer. I provided each child with a blank CD for photograph storage. They could also bring photographs of out of school literacy practices from before they were chosen to be part of the research. Contrary to my expectation, none of the children brought photographs of

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<sup>19</sup> The plastic chairs provided these children, who move around constantly due to hyperactivity or low muscle tone, with a more stable seat than the swivel chairs. However, in order to satisfy their curiosity, I allowed the children to sit in the swivel chairs for a few minutes.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendices 1 – 4 for the basic questions that were asked or discussed during the interviews.

their current literacy practices<sup>21</sup>. Three children brought photographs that were taken of emergent literacy practices.

### 3.7.Data analysis

I began my analysis by recording every instance where the children mentioned a specific literacy event, a literacy practice or showed an artefact from an activity that involved reading or writing tools. I used these activities or literacy events as the initial unit of analysis (Lenters, 2007), in order to develop an overview of the different out of school literacy practices. I used the list of features of out of school literacy practices<sup>22</sup> that I gathered from the literature review, the NLS language of description and the emergent literacy paradigm to identify out of school literacy practices. This provided me with concrete and authentic data on the out of school literacy practices that these children were engaged in.

Examples of features of out of school literacy practices could be, amongst others, the following: no adult supervision (designing comics), unconventional practices (graffiti design), identity construction (becoming a 'teacher') and practices taking place in informal spaces (on the bed). Examples of data based on NLS language of description could be 'what people do with literacy' (Barton & Hamilton, 1998:3) – e.g. writing or drawing stories; 'cultural ways of utilising literacy' (ibid 1998:7) – e.g. making an Easter card; events that were specific instances or enactments of literacy practices (Hamilton, 2000:16) – e.g. making a comic scrapbook or 'observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998:7) – e.g. designing houses as result of the extended family's building trade. An example of data based on the emergent literacy paradigm could be a photograph of a young child pretending to read an adult book.

I made a distinction between current practices and emergent literacy practices. Current out of school literacy practices are those practices that the children were currently engaged in that they do not do for school work or school homework. Artefacts comprised of samples of literacy practices that these children currently engaged in. Emergent literacy practices are those practices that children were engaged in before they entered Grade 1. These practices

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<sup>21</sup> Reasons for lack of photograph contribution given by the children were: the digital camera batteries were flat; the cell phone could not store photographs; they did not know how to burn a CD on the computer; and the computer crashed.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix 1



could therefore have been conducted at pre-school<sup>23</sup> or at home. Although perhaps not natural readers and writers as understood by the researchers of emergent literacy (Clay, 1972; Teale & Sulzby, 1991), all these children engaged in emergent reading and writing before they entered Grade 1. Artefacts of emergent literacy practices therefore included samples from pre-school or from home.

I approached the analysis for the practices of consumption and design or production of text with different resources. Following Ormerod & Ivanič (2000: 92), I applied a multimodal approach to the analyses of text design and production in artefacts. In Ormerod and Ivanič's study they not only analysed the various multimodal aspects of the artefacts they collected, such as types of writing tools used, evidence of the pressure of the writing tool on the page, page sizes, layering of writing or use of correction fluid. They also looked at 'physical characteristics' or materiality (ibid: 95 quotation marks in original) such as crumpled pages and marks made by a spilt liquid that gave further evidence of the child's involvement in the production and design of an artefact. I use a multimodal approach in my analyses by looking at a variety of visual and verbal signs. This includes, amongst others, the use of space, directionality, text conventions, writing tools and type of stationery. I also allowed the children to discuss their own designs or demonstrate to the group how they arrived at their design. This interaction with their own texts, termed 'talk around texts' which refers to 'students perspectives alongside their written texts' (Lillis & McKinney, 2003: xiii) provided me with valuable insights to the children's engagement with literacy.

Literacy practices that emerged were either typical of practices that occur in and out of school, such as reading non-fiction books, or they stood out as different to school literacy practices, such as graffiti design. I grouped the practices into those practices that are based on book reading where children consume texts and those practices that are based on design or production of text. Throughout the research the affect of the children was recorded in field notes by paying close attention in individual and group interviews to semantics, vocabulary, body language, non-verbal signs, general relationships and subtle interactions between the children. These observations constituted part of the data for the secondary question: What is

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<sup>23</sup> For the purposes of this investigation and analysis, emergent literacy practices will include literacy practices from the pre-school year, the so-called grade R or reception year. Many pre-school literacy activities in grade R concentrate on pre-reading and pre-writing skills and are not yet conventional. Some of these activities may not yet have developed into so-called conventional school reading and writing practices. This could therefore place some of the reconstructed emergent literacy practices in a school-type setting, e.g. crèche or nursery school.

the affective engagement with out of school literacy practices of these children with specific learning disabilities? The affect of the children will not be addressed as a separate issue, but will be referred to throughout the analysis wherever it adds significance to the findings.

As I interacted with the data and observations, a 'trail of thematic threads' (Dyson & Genishi, 2005: 111) emerged that provided further interpretation of the data. I explored these thematic threads and identified a number of themes relating to different kinds of engagement with literacy. I also followed the trail of unconventional literacy practices that were woven throughout the children's out of school literacy practices. Book reading practices presented me with three themes: the embodiment of reading practices, the value of books and the construction of family relationships. A fourth theme emerged from the analysis of the production and design of texts: the construction of identity through the use and subversion of conventions.

I found that some of these themes do not always match the language of description as found within the NLS paradigm, but appear to be facets of the processes that out of school literacy practices undergo as they are performed by the children in the research. Book reading as an agency for family relationships prevailed as an important process that could be traced from emergent literacy practices into current literacy practices. Taylor (1986:140) argues that

'Literacy is a dynamic process of immeasurable complexity that moves imperceptibly with the family, accommodating personal experiences of individual family members'.

Taylor also refers to the storybook as an important element of family literacies and describes how

[i]t enables the children to integrate their experiences of everyday life in readiness for their negotiations of tomorrow (ibid: 152).

These themes can therefore be likened to the rehearsal processes of children as they engage with their own and others' out of school literacy practices. As children 'rehearse' their literacy practice, interact with literacy processes and change or adapt their own practices, they discover and construct new identities for themselves. This is evident in the themes that emerged, e.g. the close family relationships formed through children's reading practices. I analysed these themes in terms of what they signify of children's interaction with literacy out of school in Chapters 4 and 5.

### 3.8.Conclusion

In this chapter I have given an overview of the general case study, the research design and the background to the research. I have clarified the sample group and explained that this case study is not about a specific school, but about children diagnosed with SLD, who attend a LSEN school. I have given a description of the interview venues. This helps to establish the “out-of-schoolness” of the interviews even though they took place on the school premises. The process of investigation and data collection methods add to the overall narrative of the research. I have also discussed in detail how the data was analysed and argued that the emergence of the themes are not necessarily addressed by the language of description of NLS. The next chapter presents findings from the research. It commences with a general overview of the children’s current and emergent literacy book reading practices, followed by themes that emerged from this out of school literacy practice.

## CHAPTER 4: CHILDREN AS CONSUMERS OF TEXTS: BOOK READING.

*. . . literacy is deeply embedded in the social processes of family life and is not some, specific list of activities added to the family agenda to explicitly teach reading (Denny Taylor, 1983:92).*

### 4.1. Introduction

In this chapter I analyse examples of emergent and current literacy practices where the children are consumers of texts, as defined in Chapter 2. Book reading, including shared book reading, was the single most common literacy practice referred to by the children across both emergent and current literacy practices.

Evidence of emergent book reading ranged from memories of participating in individual and shared book reading at home with parents and siblings, at a crèche or after-care, at a nursery school or up to grade R<sup>24</sup> at pre-school. Some of these memories were accompanied by artefacts brought to the group sessions. In other instances the children reconstructed the literacy event by talking about their favourite stories and the people in their lives who shared those stories with them. The children in this study also reported widely on their current book reading practices. An analysis of these practices reveals their love for reading and the relationships that have been formed with parents, siblings or other family members around the reading of books.

This relates to the kind of book reading identified as a common literacy practice in many middle class homes as discussed in chapter 2 (*cf.* Heath, 1982; Sulzby, 1985; Snow & Ninio, 1986; Taylor, 1986; Teale, 1986; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Studies on family literacy have also shown that there is a common thread of valuing books within middle class families and home settings (Taylor, 1986; Sénéchal *et al*, 1996). We therefore understand that book reading has a significant meaning for many middle class parents, regardless of whether this practice refers back to their own home and school experiences, personal memories or whether it is as result of 'school ways' coming into the home. The children's reports on book reading, sharing of stories, building of relationships and valuing books during both emergent and current literacy practices could point to continued parental encouragement of literacy

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<sup>24</sup>Grade R is the reception year before grade 1.

practices that started from an early age. It also highlights the role that literacy practices play as part of the process of constituting close family relationships, and not just one-off practices.

#### 4.1.2. Emerging themes

Three themes emerged from my analysis of the data on book reading. These themes are (1) the embodiment of reading practices as seen in the pleasure derived from, and rituals performed around book reading, (2) the immense value of books communicated to the children in these households and (3) the construction of family relationships through book reading rituals. The emergent literacy practices and artefacts of these children provided the most evidence for the first two themes, the embodiment of book reading and the value of books. The third theme, the construction of family relationships around book reading, was found across both emergent and current literacy practices.

Although three main themes have been identified, these themes are fluid and cannot necessarily be viewed or analysed independently of each other, e.g. analysis of embodied book reading practices also includes consideration of close family relationships. This chapter begins with a discussion of emergent literacy practices that address the first two themes, the embodiment of book reading and the value of books and book reading.

#### 4.2 Book reading as an embodied practice

Book reading in middle class homes as described by Taylor's (1986:141) 'intimate occasion' and Heath's (1982:319) 'bedtime story ritual' conjures up certain images and accessories that go with book reading, e.g. a parent sitting in or on the bed reading a bedtime story to a child and marked by 'props' such as a well-loved teddy or soft toy, flannel pajamas and animal slippers. Taylor's (1983:31) description of this ritual includes a 9-year old, who gets into the bed next to her mother, sharing stories while both are propped up by pillows.

Isaaq, the first participant whose literacy practices are discussed, vividly describes the ritual that accompanied the shared book reading that he experienced at his grandfather's home during his nursery school years. He reported how his grandfather used to fetch him from

nursery school. Once home, they both had a time of rest in his grandfather's 'naproom'<sup>25</sup>, followed by some book reading together on the bed. The stories were from a very special book which was kept in a bedside cabinet in this room. Only his grandfather was allowed to handle the book. After the story was read, the book was replaced in the bedside cabinet for the next day.

The scene of Isaaq and his grandfather lying side by side on a bed sharing a book is an example of how book reading practices are embodied. In this instance the preceding ritual provided the eventual time, space, a rested body and a body position for a grandfather and a grandson to share and enjoy a literacy event – shared book reading. In Isaaq's case these early embodied literacy practices and rituals around book reading provided him with an opportunity to forge a close relationship with his grandfather. In addition, Isaaq learnt a deep valuing of books from an early age. This bond that Isaaq formed with his grandfather through the embodied practices of reading of books, continues with him into an unconventional current literacy practice that will be described later. Embodiment in book reading is discussed here as a literacy practice. However, this practice is part of a process for Isaaq. It develops into a love for reading and other literacy practices later in his life that are shared by the rest of Isaaq's family. I find that a descriptor for this process is not captured well in the NLS language of description, i.e. the way book reading practices evolve over a lifetime and grow with the child and his family. There is a sense of durability about shared literacy practices. Here Brandt and Clinton refer to literacy as something that 'is still there when people around it are gone . . . still acting when people have stopped talking, reading or writing' (2002:348).

Elsie brought an interesting photograph<sup>26</sup> (Figure 4.1) as an artefact of emergent book reading that shows how she designed her own tableau with book reading as the central theme. The photograph contained some 'props' usually found in book reading. Elsie's grandmother explained the detail in the photograph. Elsie (five years old at the time) is lying back on a double bed with her legs bent and crossed over in front of her. She supports a Bible against her legs. Another Bible is visible on the bedside cabinet. Next to her, half hidden by a cloth bag is a promotion pamphlet from a well-known dealer on top of a folded newspaper. Her

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<sup>25</sup> Isaaq reported that the 'naproom' used to be his aunt's old room and was 'nice and cool'. At night his grandfather and grandmother slept in their own bedroom.

<sup>26</sup> Elsie and her mother gave permission for this photograph to be used for this analysis.

grandmother's watch is on the bed. Elsie's left hand holds the book against her legs and her right hand is poised to page over. She is wearing her grandmother's glasses upside down while she is 'reading' the book. A pile of cushions is behind her. The sheets, blankets and a crocheted blanket can be seen. Elsie is dressed in her pajama top and underwear as she has chicken pox and her legs are partly covered in Calamine Lotion. Elsie showed the photograph to the interviewer. This conversation followed:



Figure 4.1  
Elsie's photograph

- Elsie: [Describing the photograph.] *Reading, when I had chicken-pox.*  
Interviewer: *Look, [showing the photograph to the rest of the group] this one is where she had chicken pox.*  
Elsie: *When I was at home.*  
Interviewer: *So her whole body is covered with Calamine Lotion. Pink lotion that looks like powder all over her body . . .*  
Isaaq: *//I know*  
Interviewer: *. . . and she is reading her book.*  
Isaaq: *Elsie, your glasses are the wrong way round.*  
Elsie: *It's not my glasses, it's my granny's glasses.*  
[Laughter]  
Interviewer: *Were those your granny's glasses that you are wearing?*  
Elsie: *Yes.*

Isaaq: *Now, why were you wearing it?*  
 Elsie: *Because I was reading.*  
 Isaaq: *Do you use glasses?*  
 Elsie: *Not any more*  
 Isaaq: *OK*  
 Interviewer: *Did you use your granny's glasses for fun, or because you could not see?*  
 Elsie: *I used it for fun.*

In this photograph, book reading is vividly portrayed as an embodied practice. Elsie is using her whole body and the space and objects around her to emulate the reading posture and style of someone who is lying in bed and reading for relaxation, or due to confinement. Book readers perform a variety of actions or modify their postures in relation to their surroundings whilst reading a book. Elsie's posture, (curled up with her legs supporting her in front), the positioning of the book (propped up against her legs), the use of the space whilst reading (lying back against the pillows), other reading materials within easy reach (the Bible, pamphlets and newspapers) and the way she is dressed (partly in pyjamas) are some of the aspects of the embodied practices of book reading.

Elsie appears to be modeling complete absorption by what she 'reads'. She is performing all the correct 'reading' actions: holding the book and turning the pages. Added to this, she is wearing her grandmother's glasses which make her appear more 'able to read'. Elsie thus portrays a picture of a proficient reader, by surrounding herself with the appropriate items, actions and postures as 'props'. Elsie reported that she had seen her father read the newspaper. She must have observed how, possibly her grandmother, and likely several others, read for pleasure. I have heard children verbalise the idea that glasses can help one to read better. Elsie may have observed adults putting on glasses before reading (often called 'reading glasses'), and may have thought that the glasses would aid her reading proficiency. Her answer to why she was wearing the glasses upside-down was that the glasses were not hers, but her grandmother's. Isaaq continued to probe, wanting to know why she was wearing the glasses when they were not hers. Her answer to Isaaq was that she wore the glasses 'because I was reading'. Even though she could not yet read conventionally at this stage, she explained that she was engaged in the practice of reading and it thus still counted as reading to her. Elsie did not say that she was pretending to read; to her this was reading. (In the end Elsie said that wearing the glasses was a fun thing to do.) In addition, Elsie chose to 'read' a book without pictures that is usually read by adults or older readers, and not the advertisement pamphlet or the newspaper.



Elsie is constructing a particular identity for herself in this photograph. She is making use of a space and artefacts that belong to her grandmother. She is also copying the actions that are not only associated with reading for pleasure, but also associated with the sick or convalescent – reading books while confined to bed. She may have observed that books or magazines are often given to sick people at home or in hospitals. This may have provided her with a link to the embodied practices of the sick person (suffering from chicken pox) reading in bed, thus portraying herself as a reader.

As an emergent reader, Elsie had already recognised some details needed for a book reading ritual, whether reading for pleasure or as a ‘convalescent’ practice. She is thereby showing her great desire to be able to read. This is the type of memorable photograph that is taken by an adult when they ‘catch’ their child doing an adult activity: a little girl of five mimicking adult leisure reading. In this event Elsie’s mother may have understood her child’s aspirations to become a reader. Elsie constructed a personal and authentic reading event. In this instance we are reminded of children as designers and makers of meaning (Kress, 1997). Preparations for Elsie’s participating in this event did not require adult supervision. She made her own meaning by manipulating the space and artefacts around herself, thus constructing herself as a reader, independent of others who could already read. For Elsie this is the beginning of the construction of an identity that is still part of her daily life at the age of thirteen – a lover of books and reading. It is also thus an enduring literacy practice over time.

#### 4.3 The value of books

All the children spoke of their love of reading, with most reporting a legacy of the love of books in their families. It appears from an early stage in their lives already that these children were determined to become readers one day. This is evident in their discussion of shared book reading before they could read, memories of their first books, but most importantly the tremendous value that is placed on book reading by their parents and that is learned by the children through book rituals. Remarkably, in response to my questions, five of the six children (all but Howard) could remember with certainty what happened to their first books. Many of these books were kept and are now shared with younger siblings or family members. All the children could comment on what usually happens to old books at home.

Quinton still has his first books at home. His younger brother (4 years old) reads the books. Quinton also reads his first books as bedtime stories to his brother. He told of their study filled with many books. We can identify some significant literacy practices in this family from the interview extract below: the reading of bedtime stories and the respect for sentimental books. This is what Quinton reported:

Interviewer: *Do you ever read stories to your brother?*

Quinton: *Lots of times.*

Interviewer: *What do you read to him?*

Quinton: *Sometimes he likes the Jungle Book and the thin Harry Potter books that have pictures. He only likes pictures and 'Quiet'. It's a book about this lion who makes a noise.*

Interviewer: *When do you read to him?*

Quinton: *Before he goes to sleep.*

Interviewer: *Do you still have one of your favourite baby books at home?*

Quinton: *Oh, yes, I do!*

Interviewer: *Who reads it now?*

Quinton: *My baby brother.*

Quinton reports being involved in the reading of bed time stories with his brother. His words 'thin Harry Potter (cf. Rowling 1999) books' and 'He only likes pictures' indicate that he can accurately describe the types of books his brother prefers. He confirms with great certainty that he still has his favourite baby books at home: 'Oh, yes, I do!' This love for books adds value to the book, as Quinton later reported that books are valued in their home by keeping them for future generations. This is what he said:

Interviewer: *Now what happens generally to old story books at home, any book?*

Quinton: *They just save it until my youngest brother is older and they give it to him and if he has a child then he must give it to them.*

Not only is the book passed on to the next generation, but also the legacy of the love of books. The value of the book therefore lies in the enjoyment derived from reading the book and the possibility to pass this enjoyment on to future generations. We see again how this literacy practice is not limited to one event. The books, and the value of the books, journey with the children as they move from one event to the other. The literacy practice of passing on the value of books is therefore an unfolding process (as described by Kell 2009) that develops over time.

Isaaq reported not only on his first books, but also the first story he remembered. This story was found in a book that is still kept by his grandfather<sup>27</sup>. This book will apparently not meet the same fate as Isaaq's first personal books that he remembered. These books were given to his brothers<sup>28</sup> and are reportedly damaged by them as they do not yet value books. He reported that his brothers damaged his first books:

Isaaq: *Most of my brothers . . . I just start crying when I watch them with my books.*  
Interviewer: *Why?*  
Isaaq: *They break it*

The way in which Isaaq explains the fate of his first books, gives us a small glimpse into the personal significance of the books: he cares deeply about the books and is saddened by this unfortunate occurrence of damage to the books. Although this is much to Isaac's dismay, it is in accordance with how very young children often handle books. It therefore appears that Isaaq's favourite first books are not the baby-proof books manufactured from cloth, hard cardboard or plastic. Here we can see how the socio-cultural practice of book reading constructs the value that is placed on books in this home. The value of the book is communicated through the repetition of the book reading practice. Isaaq has learnt through this shared practice with his grandfather that books are very valuable. His younger brothers have not fully learnt this yet.

However, the book that contains his favourite story is still safe with his grandfather. He also explained that there is no need to remember any other story books, because this special book contained many stories. He said the following about his favourite story:

Interviewer: *What was your favourite story as a child?*  
Isaaq: *Jack and the Beanstalk*  
Interviewer: *Do you still have the book?*  
Isaaq: *Oooo, no! It is somewhere deep in my grandfather's house. He used to read it to me.*  
Interviewer: *Were there any other stories that you can remember?*  
Isaaq: *That book had millions of stories in it. It is a very thick book. It is special. He won't let my brothers get near [emphasised] it. He will rather read it to them.*

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<sup>27</sup> The shared story book reading ritual of Isaaq and his grandfather was discussed above.

<sup>28</sup> At the time of the interview, Isaaq's three brothers were 6 years, 4 years and one year old respectively.

When Isaaq was asked whether he could remember any other stories, he initially did not answer the question (later he added that he also remembers *Little Red Riding Hood*). Instead he explained that this book contained ‘millions of stories’. Isaaq’s use of this hyperbole justifies the unsaid answer: it is not necessary to remember all the stories. The book is possibly an anthology of fairy tales.

Isaaq’s discussion around this book supports the value that is placed on books in this instance. He tells us that the book is ‘very thick’. To some children a ‘thick’ book is an indication of the reading competence needed in order to access the content: the thicker the book, the better skilled the reader. In Isaaq’s case this book had value (above ordinary thinner books) because only an adult could read this book to children.

Isaaq also described the location of the book as ‘somewhere deep in my grandfather’s house’, portraying his grandfather as the stern guardian of books. Only the person who has access to the place where the book is kept will have access to the stories in the book. The inaccessibility of the book thus increases its value. This is further supported by Isaaq’s observation that his grandfather ‘Won’t let my brothers near it’. The younger children, who have not yet learned fully the value of books, are not allowed to touch this book. The value of this book therefore increases because it is an ‘untouchable’ book. Isaaq explained that his grandfather ‘will rather read it to them.’ This is an indication that the value of this book is not just determined by its thickness or its (in)accessibility. The value of this book also lies in the sociocultural purpose of the book: books that are read by adults to young children form an important part of developing close family relationships.

Richard reported that all his first books are still kept on a shelf at home. This family does not give away books, but keeps them on a shelf until a younger sibling is ready to read them. This is what Richard said:

Interviewer: *Do you still have, at home somewhere, some of the first books you read as a child?*

Richard: *Yes, my mommy has a whole shelf full of the books she read to me when we were little.*

Interviewer: *What normally happens, even to the big story books, when people have finished reading them at your home?*

Richard: *With my mom, she has her own collection of books, but if you read of it, we must put it exactly [emphasised] where we found it. And if*

- I'm done, I'll just put it on the shelf, for anybody else like my sister when she gets older she can read it.*
- Interviewer: *So the books aren't thrown away or recycled?*
- Richard: *No, I don't throw my books away. [He shook his head solemnly at this point]*
- Interviewer: *Where is this bookshelf?*
- Richard: *You walk into the lounge and then as you turn in, there's our back door, the front door they call it, and then next to the door there's our bookshelf.*
- Interviewer: *And there's a lot of books on the bookshelf?*
- Richard: *Yes.*
- Interviewer: *What kind of books does your mommy read?*
- Richard: *My mommy? Things that help you with life and that, or about . . . , she doesn't read so much because she is always so busy, but I looked through her collection. There's stuff about pregnancy, the Bible and cooking books, mostly cooking books.*

It is interesting to see how Richard describes the storage of his first books: 'a whole shelf full of the books she read to me'. For many middle class families a display of books signifies the value they place on literacy practices such as book reading, studying, book collection, intellectual pursuits, interests and hobbies. Richard's first books share an important space on this bookshelf: 'a whole shelf' has been allocated for this collection. This affirms the value that is still placed on books that are no longer read by Richard, as well as books that were read to him. This can be seen in his comment that the shelf is also 'full of the books she read to me when we were little'. All the books on this part of the shelf belong in the same emergent literacy category of first books.

The many titles on this bookshelf shows that this family uses books for a variety of reasons. Baby books, pregnancy books, cookery books and the Bible, amongst others all share the space. It is interesting that Richard reported here on his mother's collection of books. He said that he 'looked through her collection' and saw books on pregnancy. In some households books on these topics may not be in shared family spaces, whereas other families freely give space and discussion on these topics. Even though Richard's mother may not have another pregnancy, she has still kept the book on the shelf.

In Richard's family this bookshelf demarcates one of the domains in his house where books can be found, regardless of their individual purpose. The cookery book is not necessarily in the kitchen, the Bible not necessarily on the bedside table and the baby books used many years ago are not stored out of sight. This bookshelf appears to be like a library for this family. It has books that are still in use such as the cookery books and books that are stored

(for later use), such as the “first” books. The variety of books on this bookshelf is evidence that this family values books not only as a source of information and an artefact to be revisited, but also as part of a legacy that can be passed on to the next generation. Richard means it when he says ‘I don’t throw my books away’.

Heath reminds us that the bedtime story is a major literacy event that sets ‘patterns of behaviour that occur repeatedly through the life of mainstream children and adults’ (1982:319). The valuing of books, in particular those first books that contain the bedtime stories or the simple first word books, appears to be a common thread within the home life of the children in this study. They are discussed and described by the children, not as hand-me-downs, but rather as family heirlooms. These first books do not lose their value with the passage of time or a change of home, but are kept within the family and home, signifying valued cultural practices. However, far more important than the physical book being passed on or kept on a shelf, is the passing on of the valuing of a love of books. In addition, there is also the passing on of book reading practices that are unique to each family and highly valued by the members of these families. Thus, it is not just the book that is passed on to the next generation, but also the ideals and aspirations that surround the book and the reading practices. It is as if the value of the love of books transcends the book itself. This value of the love of books is one of the practices that creates the desire in children to learn to read at an early age. This desire follows them into subsequent literacy practices.

#### 4.4 The role of book reading in the construction of family relationships and identities within a family

Taylor (1986) speaks of literacy as a complex and dynamic process that varies with the family.

Each family member’s experience of print is personally constructed as well as socially owned, so that what is literacy to one, may not be literacy to another. I believe that it is within this context in the unremarkable daily event of family life, that children learn of print as a social enterprise as well as a solitary endeavor, and that it is from this perspective that we can begin to appreciate the plurality of literacies that are a part of a child’s world (ibid: 140).

The role of book reading in the construction of family relationships can be viewed from the two angles that Taylor portrays: print as ‘a social enterprise’ and as ‘a solitary endeavor’. The practices around reading books to children are by nature social activities. Family bonds

often develop and are strengthened during these practices, and can happen from early years<sup>29</sup>. Marsh (2006) refers to literacy practices that establish and maintain relationships in families and points out ‘the rich range of practices in which family relationships were reinforced and extended’ (ibid: 23) in the Cairney and Ruge study.

Family relationships are also shaped by the views of, and reactions to, the solitary literacy activities of the members in a family. Some parents may voice or show the great pride they have in their children spending vast amounts of time on solitary literacy activities, e.g. reading for pleasure or card making. This not only confirms parental approval of the activity, but also affirms the child as a contributor to valued family practices. This strengthens family belonging and family bonds. Other parents may react with displeasure at the amount of time spent at solitary literacy activities, considering them as distraction from school work or home chores. This incongruity may result in tension between the parent and the child and may be viewed as a hindrance in family relationships.

Evidence of the social and individual use of print in this research can be seen in emergent literacy data, as well as current literacy practices. The children reported on the social interaction between themselves and their parents or grandparents in shared book reading before they went to school. Elsie portrayed reading as a solitary emergent literacy practice when she pretended to read her grandmother’s book, as discussed above. Her mother’s approval of this solitary activity is shown by the taking of the photograph and “marking” it as an event worthy to be brought to the attention of the researcher. Quinton reported on print in a social interaction whereby he and his mother are currently teaching his brother to read from his (Quinton’s) baby books. On the other hand, during discussions on current literacy practices some children reported frustration at siblings interrupting their solitary reading endeavours, causing possible sibling conflict.

The children in this study mostly remembered their mothers reading to them when they were younger. Richard can remember his grandmother reading to him and Isaaq remembered special story times with his grandfather. There were no reports of fathers participating in shared book reading. Although mothers often contribute most in family literacy research, research has shown that fathers are involved and interested in their children’s literacy

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<sup>29</sup> Isaaq and his grandfather enjoying storybook reading as discussed earlier.

practices (Saracho, 2007). Whichever way print is used by the different members of a family, the data show how literacy practices, such as book reading, contribute to the forging of close family relationships.

Isaaq reported his grandfather frequently reading his favourite story, *Jack and the beanstalk*, to him. Part of the book reading ritual for young children is to often request their favourite story to be read to them (Feitelson & Goldstein, 1986; Mason & Allen, 1986; Holdaway, 1982; Morrow & Gambel, 2001). This ritual was also performed by Isaaq and his grandfather:

Interviewer: *How often did he read it to you?*

Isaaq: *Yoh! A lot. It's almost so much I can't remember, almost every second day. He used to pick me up from nursery school. Then he would take a little nap. And then I'd always ask him to read to me. It was almost every day and it was the same story and I also remember . . . it also had Little Red Riding Hood in it.*

Interviewer: *How did you feel when your grandfather read from this special book to you all the time?*

Isaaq: *Oh, I felt so happy. And I felt special. And my grandfather did not mind.*

Isaaq's use of the words 'It's almost so much I can't remember' indicates that he heard the story so frequently that he cannot remember how many times. Isaaq's report shows that book reading with his grandfather is still a very pleasant memory for him. By saying 'I felt happy' and 'I felt special', he verbalizes a very strong affective engagement in this relationship between him, his grandfather and the book. The shared reading is part of the building of that relationship, further evidence of my earlier point. Isaaq also reported that the reading of the book was not experienced as a chore to his grandfather, as his grandfather 'did not mind'. Although I did not ask a specific question about how his grandfather felt about having to read the same story many times, the question has a leading phrase: 'all the time'. This phrase indicated that his grandfather could have become tired of reading the same story many times. Nevertheless, Isaaq remembers that his grandfather did not mind doing so. Isaaq's use of the words 'I felt special and happy', his excited tone of voice and animated non-verbal body language when he spoke about his favourite story read to him by his grandfather, are further indicators that strong and lasting relationships were formed in the home domain through the cultural practice of shared book reading and not necessarily as result of a cluster of single book reading events.



Relationships are also formed between siblings sharing book reading with parents. Quinton reported how he shares his knowledge of reading to help his mother with teaching his younger brother to read. The conversation that followed further highlighted the theme of family relationships and book reading. This is what Quinton said about his old books:

Interviewer: *Who reads it now?*

Quinton: *My baby brother. Me and my mom are teaching him how to read.*

Interviewer: *Even before he goes to school? You are teaching him how to read?*

Quinton: *Ja.*

In this instance one adult and two children are involved in shared book reading, with the younger child taking on the role of learner. The mother would be the most probable to fill the role as teacher. However, Quinton is sharing his reading skills and books, and reports the teaching as the combined effort of himself and his mother. In this relationship building, Quinton is thus negotiating an alternative identity for himself, that of a teacher.

In a further example of the construction of sibling relationships, Isaaq reported how he interacts with his brother, using a book as the starting block. Isaaq likes to read about sport. Isaaq uses the knowledge he has gained from reading cricket books to teach his younger brother to improve his technique:

Isaaq: *I took out one book out of the library. I don't know its name. It's a cricket book and it shows you all the strokes, how to play it, when to play it and stuff.*

And later . . .

Isaaq: *So, my brother, he plays cricket with me and I taught him how to bowl and stuff. I am starting to regret it, because now he is bowling me out!*

Interviewer: *Oh, really?*

Isaaq: *Yes, and it's hard to sometimes face his balls and he is only five. So all I hope is that he can be a good cricketer.*

In this instance Isaaq sees himself as a teacher and instructor, referring not to the benefit he derives from the book, but the benefit that his ability to read the book has for another. Isaaq became the conduit of knowledge between the book and his brother, who at five is not yet able to read. His great aspirations for his brother are illustrated by his words 'all I hope'. Isaaq must have shown a vast amount of patience in order to transfer this book knowledge and his own cricket skills to a sibling nearly seven years his junior. In this instance, Isaaq is building a firm and possibly a devoted relationship with his sibling, not unlike the

relationship that was formed between him and his grandfather. Isaaq is applying a similar measure of patience to that of his grandfather when he read stories to him. Close relationships are thus constructed through literacy practices.

Quinton gave another slant to reading at home. He told of his reading 'too' much. This is what he said when he spoke about his favourite adventure series, *Charlie Bone* (e.g. Nimmo, 2002):

Quinton: *Charlie Bone – I almost read all the books. Sometimes when I read my dad tells me to get away from the book and I just want to read more!*

In Quinton's experience we see that his father puts a stop to his reading. His use of the words 'get away from the book' is an indication that his father does not just want him to read less, but to be removed from the book. From the adult's point of view, Quinton could be reading 'too much', to the exclusion of other activities such as homework, chores, meal times or ablutions. This is an irony, considering the great importance and value that are placed on books in this home. This illustrates how later in life, reading for pleasure becomes more regulated. The incident constructs the parent as the disciplinarian and Quinton as the child and gives him a clear message of the family composition and his place in the family, confirming his identity as the compliant child.

For Quinton there is retribution. When the group discussed why they like to read at home, Quinton reported the following about the fun of reading at home:

Quinton: *//It's fun!*

Interviewer: *It's fun?*

Quinton: *Uhm-mm!*

Interviewer: *Why is it fun for you? You are the boy who reads so much that your dad says to you to stop reading!*

Quinton: *That's sometimes. Like, once my dad gave me this one book that was all about Nelson Mandela, but I didn't want to finish it. So one time I hid the book in the study and I took another book and I started reading it.*

Interviewer: *And which other book did you read?*

Quinton: *I read Charlie and the Chocolate factory.*

Interviewer: *So you preferred to read Charlie and the Chocolate factory to, . . . Is it Mr Mandela's Long walk to Freedom?*

Quinton: *Mm-mm [nods]*

Interviewer: *It was probably the abridged version, not the big, thick one, was it?*

Quinton: *It was the big, thick one.[Made big eyes.]*

Interviewer: [Laughs at his response] *So it was the big, thick one! So you went and hid it in the study and took out Charlie and the Chocolate factory.*  
Quinton: *And I told my dad I finished the book.*

Here we can see a disagreement between the parent's choice of book and the child's choice of book. Quinton 'hid' the non-preferred book, read something else and even told his father that he had read the father's choice of book. In this instance Quinton subverted the adult's book choice. He also repositions himself as the child who now has the power of personal choice. Quinton's actions indicate pride and especially his pleasure in the self-selection of texts. He 'hid' the book away in a place where any book can be 'hid' – in the study. Instead he made his own choice, in strong contrast to in-school literacy practices where the choice of text is often precluded. Here Quinton is involved in a solitary reading practice that differs from his father's choice of book. Quinton is showing here that despite close family relationships in his home, he can assert his book choices. In this way Quinton is forming his own individuality within the family.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

Book reading was reported by all the children as the most popular out of school literacy practice, both currently and at emergent literacy stage. The children showed a delight in the consumption of texts, particularly when the reading material matched their interest level.

There are three over-arching themes that emerged from the analysis of the book reading data. These are (1) the embodiment of reading practices as seen in the pleasure derived from, and rituals performed around book reading, (2) the value of books communicated to the children in these households and (3) book reading and its role in the construction of family relationships.

Within these three themes some features of out of school literacy practices, as discussed in Chapter 2, can be seen in the literacy practices that these children were engaged in. These children reflected on literacy practices, as opposed to simply completing literacy tasks. They commented on their feelings of enjoyment and pleasure in activities out of school, as opposed to some who reported that they did not like in-school activities. Some of these literacy practices did not have "due dates". The children were engaged in book reading, particularly series of books, over an extended period of time. Out of school literacy practices can also

negotiate different identities for children. Quinton became the ‘teacher’ when he reported that he reads to his brother with the specific intention to ‘teaching him how to read’. Elsie became a ‘reading grandmother’ when she pretended to read her grandmother’s Bible at the age of five. Isaaq also became a teacher when he taught batting skills to his younger brother that he had read about in a book. Quinton constructed an identity of a reader who could make his own book choices.

Book reading in families, shared or solitary, plays a significant role in the forging of family relationships. These relationships provide the child with positive memories of literacy practices, events and moments. Over a period of time these moments develop into a deep love of reading, an immense valuing of books and an identity as a proficient reader. I argue that while the NLS descriptors accurately define ‘events’ and ‘practices’, we need further descriptors for the processes of literacy practices, i.e. the development of literacy practices within family units in different spaces and over time. By considering the transcontextual flow of meanings across space and time (Kell, 2009) and the translocal (Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009), we may establish a more accurate picture of what happens with literacy events and practices within families.

In the next chapter I analyse out of school literacy practices in areas where text is used for the design or production of literacy.

## CHAPTER 5: THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY THROUGH THE PRODUCTION AND DESIGN OF TEXTS.

*It is important to make the point that children do not need the full scribal mastery to make meaning as authors* (Kerryn Dixon, 2010:116).

### 5.1. Introduction

Young children from middle class homes are typically not only involved in the consumption of texts, but also the production of texts before they reach school. In this chapter I analyse examples of emergent and current literacy practices where the children are producers and designers of texts, as defined in Chapter 2. Kress (1997:36) points out that children intentionally design and make signs. Their designs are unique rather than 'mere copying' (ibid: 37). Children may also have a unique way of 'drawing' writing. A young pre-literate child does not necessarily plan to write a text followed by an illustration or *vice versa*. As Kress agrees,

. . . she is drawing both the print and the image; or writing both the print and the image. It is probably not a distinction that is sensible to her (ibid: 61).

In the analysis of the production and design practices of these children, I have found evidence of the unconventional ways (Sulzby, 1986; Teale & Sulzby, 1986) in which young children use texts in order to construct identities for themselves. Artefacts from later stages show that children are able to 'invent their own literacies' (Goodman, 1986:1) by designing comics and graffiti where they subvert the generally understood conventions of that genre.

The children referred to comic designs, card making, story writing, designing homes, clothing and graffiti and making comic scrapbooks as the out of school literacy practices that involve production and design. It appears that these production and design practices were based on the participant's specific interest, e.g. Isaaq's preference for house designs could be as result of his future dream of becoming an architect together with his exposure to building plans through his many family members who work in the building trade. Each home and each family provides a child with different cultural or social platforms, home or family rituals, spaces and materials with which to construct their own meanings and identities as designers and producers of their own texts.

## 5.2. An emerging theme: identity construction

I explored one overarching theme which emerged from my analysis of the data on children as designers and producers of texts: the construction of identity through production and design of texts. This theme is underpinned by the role that youth popular culture plays in the production and design of text, as well as the way in which out of school literacy practices are viewed as unregulated when compared with the more regulated practices of in school literacy. This is discussed in the second part of the chapter.

The children were engaged in a variety of production and design activities that revealed how they position themselves as authors and designers of text. I argue that the construction of identities through text design is interrelated with the use of conventions in the participants' designs. That is, the children construct their identities through their use, adaptation and subversion of design conventions, e.g. Isaaq becomes a home designer by applying conventions that he observed on building plans, and adapting these conventions to suit a cultural need in his design. In turn, the ability to subvert text conventions constructs identities for the participants, e.g. Richard's alternative choice of one frame per page in his comic design constructs the identity position of a perfectionist designer. This chapter begins with an analysis of the construction of identity through text production, and starts off by exploring how a child is constructed as a reader and author through a news story.

### 5.2.1. Identity as a reader and author constructed through a news story

Elsie brought a 16-page booklet of news that she created six years ago while attending crèche. The book consisted of her own graphics accompanied by a caption in her own words, written by the teacher. Elsie chose to talk about a drawing where she was reading a book (Figure 5.1). The accompanying text strongly supports her identity as an aspirant reader. Elsie explained it as follows:

- Elsie: [Showing pages from her book] *Here I am reading a book and that is my teddy bear.*  
Interviewer: *And what is this?* [Pointing to a triangular shape.]  
Elsie: *That's my bed. I couldn't draw a bed properly.*

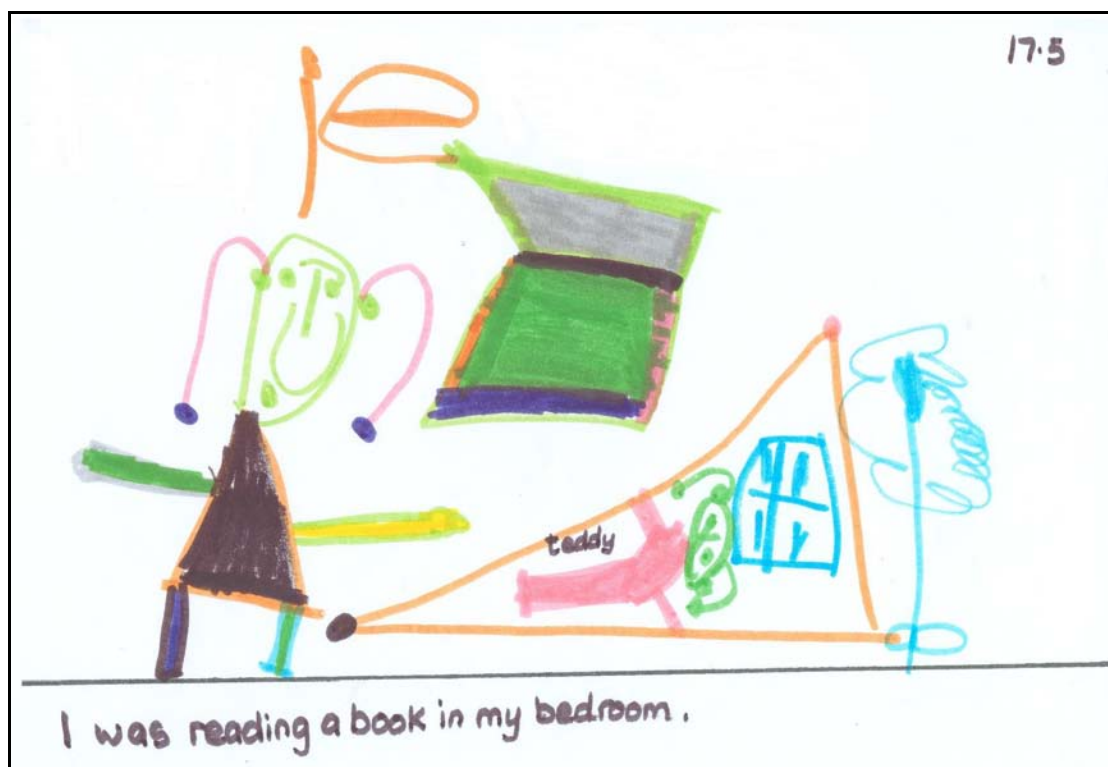


Figure 5.1  
 “News”: Elsie’s drawing of her book and teddy on her bed.

At this stage Elsie was developing pre-reading and writing skills. This picture is Elsie’s representation of a literacy event that was significant to her. In the picture we can see how Elsie constructed an identity position for herself: Elsie as the reader. She placed herself in a personal space – her own bedroom – a place where reading for pleasure often takes place. In a similar manner to the way in which she was found reading her grandmother’s Bible<sup>30</sup>, she also drew pictures of the “props” that surround this solitary reading activity: the bed, the teddy and the open book. The size and solid colouring of the book afford it a place that is central to the event depicted. Her identity as an aspirant reader is again constructed and supported by these items. Elsie’s choice of words for the caption emphasises the newsworthiness of a supposedly common or everyday activity such as reading a book in one’s bedroom. Elsie experienced and reported on these practices in her household. She spoke of her grandmother (*cf.* Chapter 4) and father<sup>31</sup> reading books or papers. Book reading practices may be ordinary activities in her household, but they are viewed as significant enough by Elsie to find a place in a news book. By adding the event to the news book, she has constructed herself as a “fledgling journalist” who reported on an aspirant reader’s

<sup>30</sup> Discussed in Chapter 4

<sup>31</sup> Elsie reported: “My dad, he washes the car, or, well, just lie in bed and read the newspaper.”

literacy practice. For Elsie this is not just a single literacy event. Being an aspirant reader and writer is part of a process that develops over time.

### 5.2.2. Identity as author constructed through card making

Elsie made an Easter card for her parents one and a half months before she turned six, which she individualized by adding her own writing. Typical of pre-school practices, Elsie decorated the outline of an Easter egg for the front of a card for her parents, using seven different colours. She individualised this card in three ways. She was not regulated by the black outlines of the pre-drawn shape, but created shapes in a pattern of colours around the bottom half of the egg shape, making the egg unique (Figure 5.2).

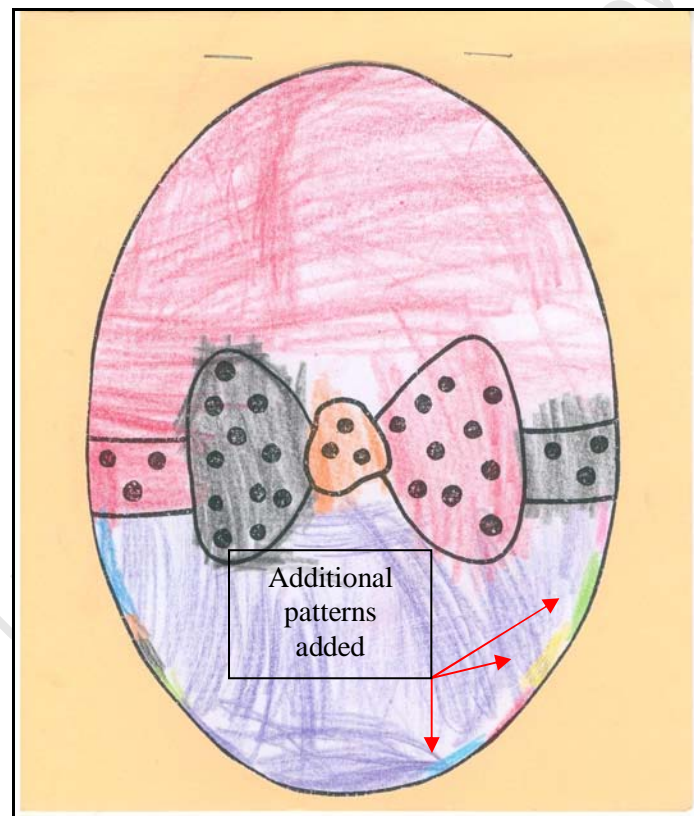


Figure 5.2  
Elsie's unique Easter card – front page

Elsie also made her own design (possibly her attempt at drawing an egg shape) at the back of the card using a red pencil crayon (Figure 5.3).



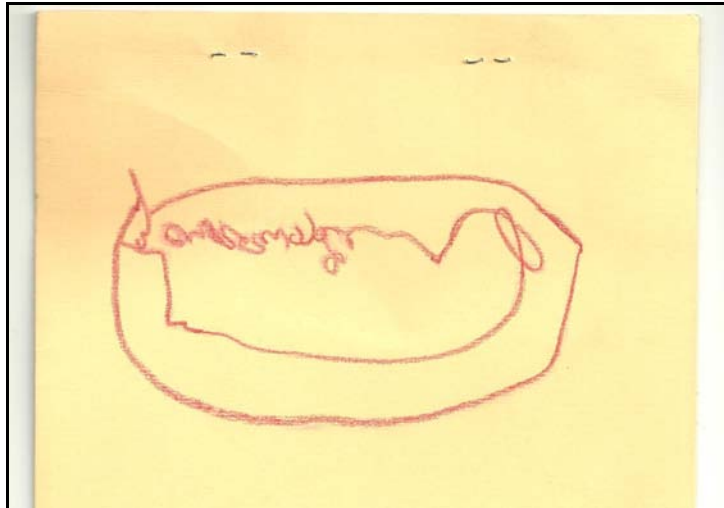


Figure 5.3  
Elsie's own Easter egg design – back page

Elsie then added her own writing to the card. Her teacher wrote the message and Elsie's name in felt-tip pen on the inside pages: 'To Mom & Dad' (top inside page) and 'Happy Easter Love Elsie' (bottom inside page). Using unconventional writing, which appears as scribbles, Elsie added her own message to the card in ballpoint pen. On the top inside part she continued with the letter 'o' in the word 'To', in a type of perseveration<sup>32</sup> or repetitive manner. She used space innovatively by first writing down and then up. This is not in keeping with the conventional straight line of school writing. She added more of these repetitive markings to the second line of writing (Figure 5.4).

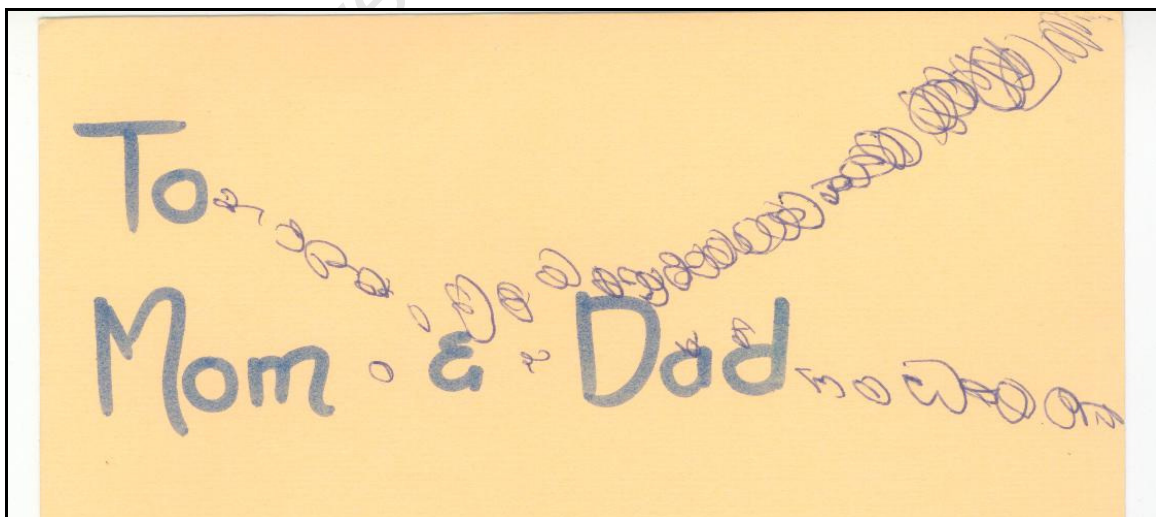


Figure 5.4  
Elsie's card - top inside page

<sup>32</sup> . "Continuous perseveration" (Sandson & Albert 1984) involves the inability to inhibit a motor act' (Moses *et al* 2004:70) [Inverted commas in original].

Elsie wrote some of her letters over, between and touching the teacher's letters. This is an indication that her writing style was not yet dominated by school writing techniques. The result is a rather pleasing, near symmetrical, image of a mixture of conventional and unconventional writing.

On the bottom inside she wrote some more, repeating what looks like the last letters of the words in each row. Elsie writes to the very end of the page, uses all the space available to her in that "line". The result appears to be a type of cursive writing, which adds Elsie's own touch to the card (Figure 5.5).

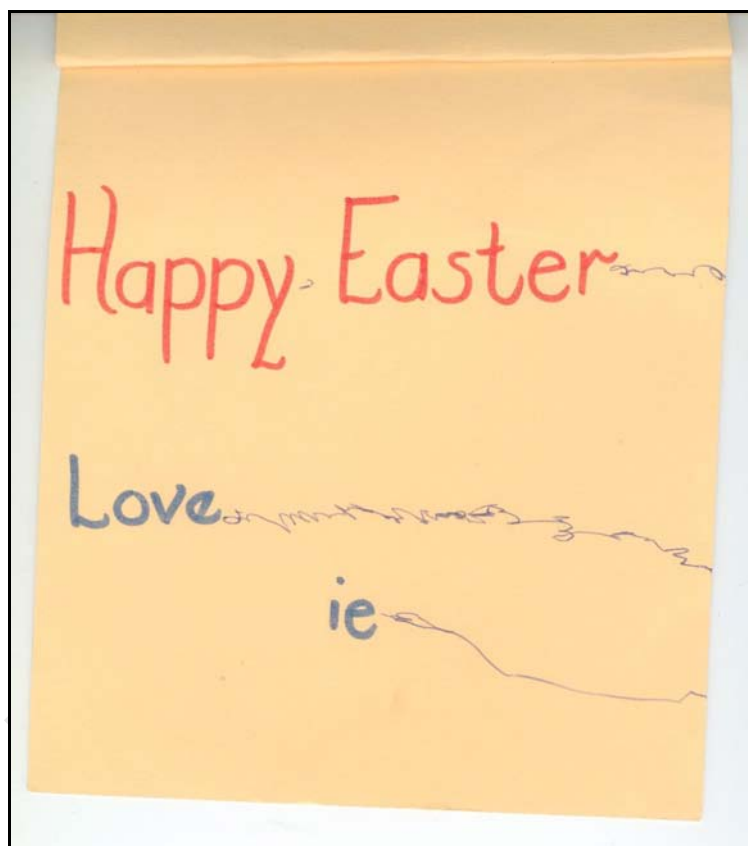


Figure 5.5  
Elsie's card - bottom inside page

Elsie also shows an awareness of the variety of tools that can be used to produce text. She used crayons for the colouring in on the front cover and her own design at the back. She then changes to pen to write her message. Handwriting exercises in school exercise books in the Foundation Phase and at times the early years of Intermediate Phase are initially written in pencil and later, once cursive writing and neatness have been mastered, in pen. Dixon (2010:120) refers to the felt-tip pens used in pre-schools as showing an ability to handle

‘implements that are viewed as “dangerous” ’ because they are permanent (inverted commas in original text). Elsie chose, in a type of ‘school way’, to use a ballpoint pen for her writing. Elsie explained later: ‘My teacher had ball point pens and I got it from her’, making pens part of the everyday writing tools at her pre-school. Dixon refers to the writing in pen (in Foundation Phase) as:

. . . a symbol and acknowledgment of a level of “maturity”. The child who writes in pen is no longer stuck in the lowest rank . . . but is able to take on the responsibility of producing indelible ink marks (ibid: 135).

At this stage Elsie may not have been aware of when pens are allowed in the school grades. To Elsie the pen is just another writing tool. Her use of pen shows that she had made a distinction between drawing and writing by choosing a pen to add her own message to the words and a red crayon to add her own picture of an egg at the back of the card.

### 5.2.3. Identity shaped around a designer with future aspirations

A further design practice that drew attention to children’s identity construction through literacy, was Isaaq’s house designs. Isaaq’s identity as a designer is embedded within caring relationships at home where family literacy practices appear to prevail. Isaaq comes from a family of builders. He has seen his grandfather and uncles opening up and looking at their building plans and discussing the contents. This is how he explained his interest in designing homes:

Interviewer: *Do you know of a designer or an architect in your family?*

Isaaq: *Not designers, not architects, but builders, from my father’s side. My father that died side. His father is a builder, his father’s brother has a company, but he died, so he handed it over to his two sons. And my uncle, he is a tiler, but he does building and stuff with his guys also.*

Interviewer: *Do you often see them walking around with plans?*

Isaaq: *No, no, no. I saw them sitting once with my grandpa in the room and they looked at the plan and stuff. First, I wanted to be a builder, but then I looked at it . . . and have my own building company, before this architect thing. [Pointing to his designs] I want to go study to be an architect and maybe I can be an architect and a builder, because my company could do both.*

Isaaq lost his biological father when he was three years old. He is nevertheless immersed in the building trade through male family members who are builders, the family building business and the building discussions that take place at home. Isaaq is allowed to be an observer when plans are discussed. Isaaq’s inclusion (even if peripheral) in the family

literacy practice of conferring about building plans, reinforces and maintains the relationship that developed between him and his grandfather when they enjoyed shared reading experiences (*cf.* Chapter 4). In addition, relationships with extended family members, such as his uncles, are formed. Isaaq's inclusion also functions as an occasion where he can access displayed information from the building plans and hone designing skills through the building jargon – a very specific type of literacy in his family.

A number of studies have been done on the influence that family literacy practices have on young children (*cf.* Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Stein & Slonimsky, 2006; Marsh, 2006). In Marsh's (2006:25) study of home literacies she refers to 'global mediascapes' that provide scripts for children's own imaginative play. Marsh bases the term 'mediascapes' on J.A. Appadurai's reference to both 'the global distribution of media and the images/ideologies distributed through media' . . . that . . . 'are experienced by global audiences as a complex mix of modes' (*ibid* 2006:22). In Isaaq's case the family members and the family legacy have provided him with a script. This script stimulates his imagination as he engages in his own literacy practice, designing homes. We see a similar provision of script for an imaginative literacy practice in Stein and Slonimsky's (2006) ethnographic study of literacy practices in a middle class Johannesburg family. The family wants a new house and the children are included in the process of house buying. The event happens around the kitchen table, with newspapers spread open on the property pages. Much discussion follows questions from the children on various aspects of the house advertisements. This leads to the children becoming involved in imaginative play, designing their own advertisements. Like the children in this study, Isaaq is also captivated by the literacy practices modeled by adults in the family. These practices help to establish an identity for Isaaq as a member of his family of builders.

One aspect of his identity that is formed through the design of houses is Isaaq's aspirations for the future. Isaaq brought a house design artefact to a group discussion that shows an interesting front facing drawing of a kitchen with eight appliances of which seven are labeled: an oven, a stove, a kettle, a milkshake machine, a microwave, a snackwich maker, a toaster and a coke (soft drink) machine (Figure 5.6). The milkshake machine and the coke machine are dream appliances for a child. Isaaq is using his design skills to construct a home for himself, at the same time constructing the identity of someone who is living in comfort. Through his designs he is thus showing his aspirations for a 'dream home', not unlike the *Top*

*Billing*<sup>33</sup> programme which he depicts on the screen in his TV-room design. By putting this design down on paper, in black and white, he is making his aspirations more concrete. He is showing his capabilities through his newly constructed identity as a designer of dream homes.

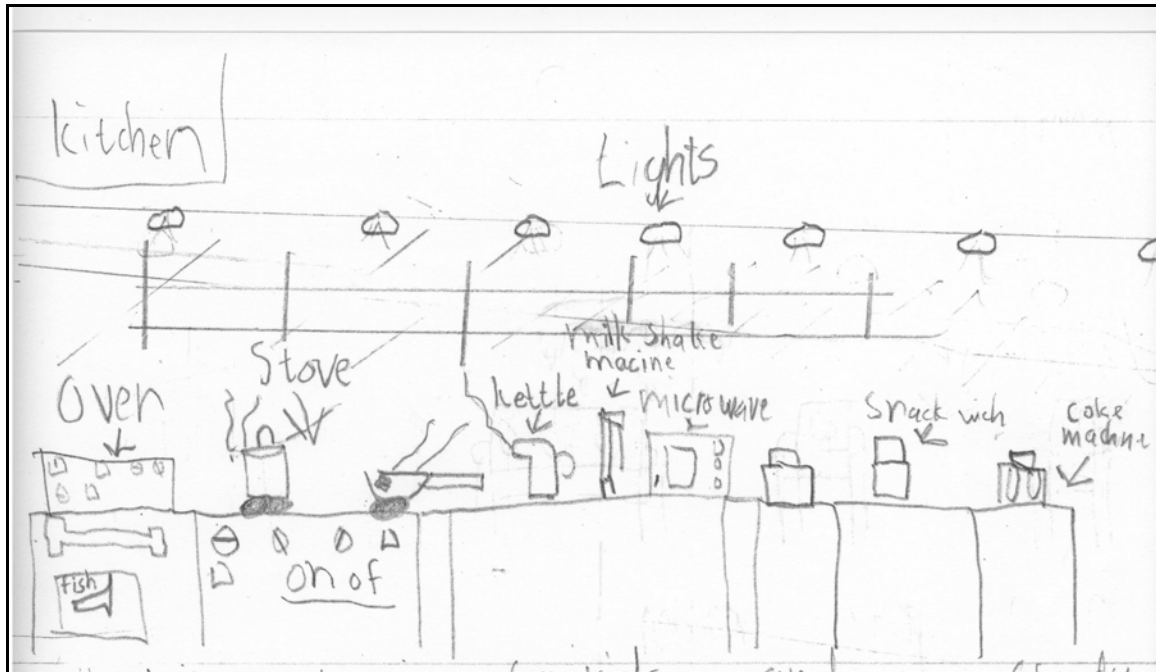


Figure 5.6  
The Kitchen

Isaaq has drawn equally interesting designs of two TV rooms. He makes a gender distinction in his designs: a room for women (Figure 5.7) and a room for men, also called a Sport Room (Figure 5.8). Isaaq explained this as follows:

Because . . . OK, if a whole lot of men come over, and their wives come over and the men want to watch the game and the women want to watch *Top Billing* or *Days of our lives* or anything like that . . . Where are they going to sit? They are going to have an argument. So, that's why it's separate.

The gender distinction is also made in the furniture and appliances. The women's room has couches, a very large chandelier and a flat screen showing the programme *Top Billing*.

<sup>33</sup> *Top Billing*, a weekly aspirational show, and the longest running magazine programme on South African television, showcases lifestyle trends based on and broadcasted from the dreams of different interior designers (<http://www.tvsa.co.za/showinfo.asp?showid=82> ).

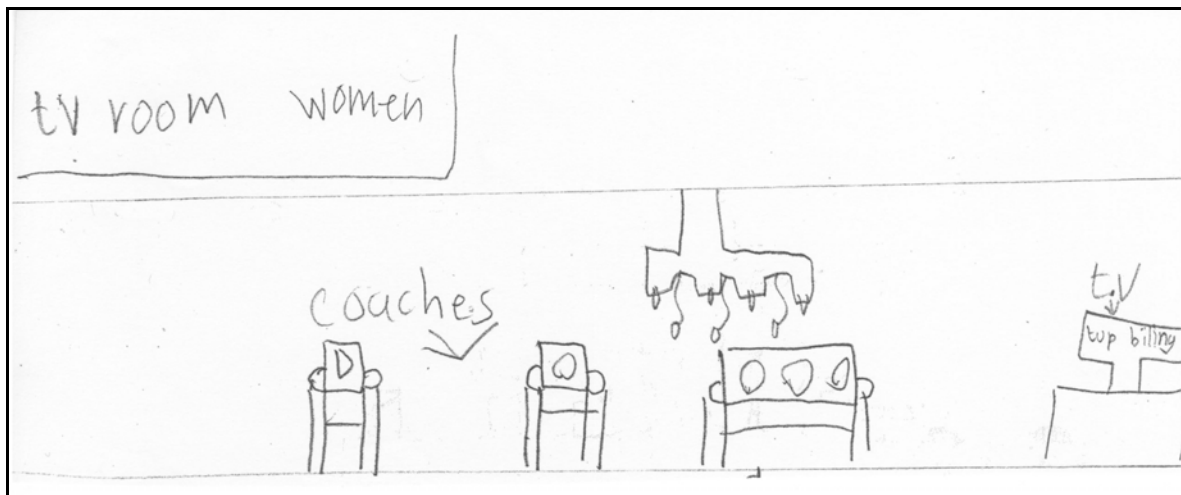


Figure 5.7  
TV Room – Women

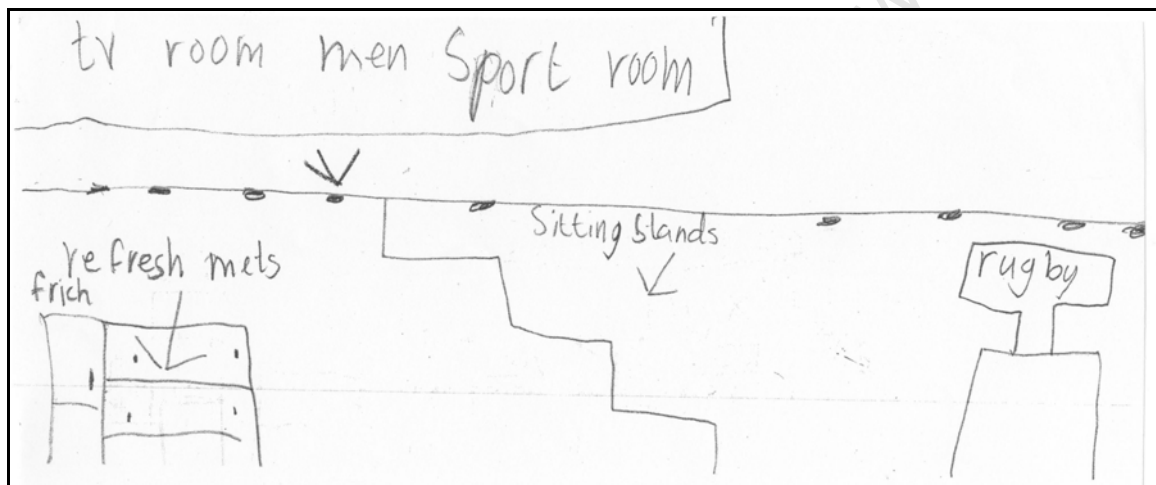


Figure 5.8  
TV Room – Men

The men's room has pavilion-like seating stands, down-lighters, a refreshment station that includes a fridge and a flat screen showing rugby. This not only makes it comfortable for the male viewers, but also replicates the pavilion seats in a stadium, making the viewing more life-like. Isaaq constructs himself as considerate of others as he takes into account the comfort of both males and females.

Isaaq comes from a family with cultural practices which are related to the Muslim religion, e.g. separate spaces for the socialization of men and women. Isaaq's portrayal of the likes of sport fans (and by implication, the dislikes, e.g. arguing women), may be as a result of observing the socialization of adults in his family. This may be accurate in his family context. Quarrels over TV programmes also occur in other families and cultures. Although

men from other cultural or religious traditions may dominate sport supporter domains, they do not necessarily have gendered social spaces. Through his gender differentiated design for TV rooms, Isaaq also positions himself as the peacemaker in his context – he attempts to please both parties. Through his designs, Isaaq thus constructs for himself a number of identity positions: a capable house designer, an aspirational owner of a comfortable house, the considerate designer and the peacemaker who can keep family members happy using his design skills. These identities are part of a process that commenced many years before when he enjoyed shared emergent book reading practices with his grandfather. The process will continue to grow and develop as he follows his dream. This gives us another indication that a literacy practice does not stand alone, but is part of a greater process that evolves over time and space.

### 5.3. Identity construction and popular culture

#### 5.3.1. Graffiti design as a platform for identity construction

Graffiti design appears to emerge as an out of school practice that provided the children with freedom from the error and correction practices as experienced in school. Four of the six children designed graffiti, using different writing tools and font styles. (Figures 5.9 – 5.12).



Figure 5.9  
Richard's design

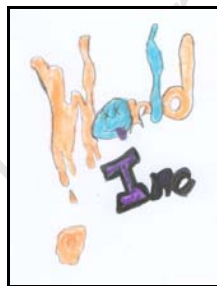


Figure 5.10  
Daniel's design

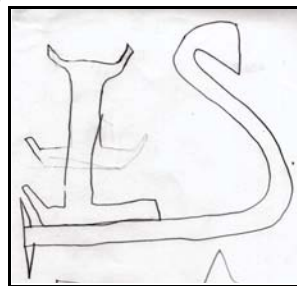


Figure 5.11  
Isaaq's design

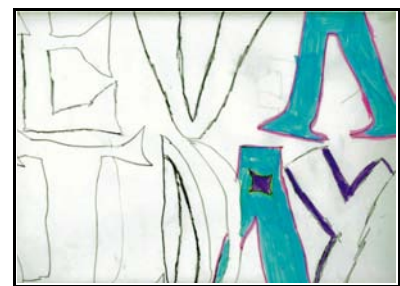


Figure 5.12  
Quinton's design

The children were aware of the “illicit” nature of graffiti, expressed by Staiger (2005:556) as ‘ “illegitimate” symbols of identity in the everyday life of students’ (inverted commas in original text) and derived much pleasure from these design activities. The animated talk around how they use, adapt and rework their designs confirmed that the children enjoyed constructing themselves as capable graffiti artists and members of this popular youth culture.

Daniel's awareness of the transgressive nature of graffiti is seen in his remark that his mother would kill him if he had to do graffiti on the walls.

Richard and Daniel commented on the freedom from error in graffiti:

Richard: *With graffiti it doesn't matter. There's no mistakes with graffiti.*

Daniel: *If you go wrong somewhere, then it doesn't matter.*

Both boys showed a clear gratification with the liberty they have with producing graffiti designs that do not have to be perfect. According to them errors can be manipulated and reincorporated into the design. Richard, whose writing and drawing designs verge onto perfection, used the adaptability and flexibility of the graffiti designs to bolster his identity as a creative perfectionist. He explained that errors could be disguised as follows: 'It is just where my hand swerves the pencil. And I fix it up a little bit and make it look nice'. Daniel made a similar comment when he said that 'go[ing] wrong . . . doesn't matter'. Daniel does not remove the error but adds colour to it: 'When I go wrong with my graffiti I just leave it and I just add colour to it'. Daniel is showing how he reworks his design, not eliminating the error, but integrating it within the design. This gives him a sense of power, something he might not get from making mistakes in the classroom where it 'does matter'. School literacy is based on a set of universal skills that have to be mastered in order to execute reading and writing accurately, e.g. finding and writing down the correct answer in a comprehension test.

Kress argues of children as designers who are in charge of their own designs that these children

choose the materials which best serve their sign-making purposes, they construct the signs as plausible apt expressions of *their* interest, and act transformatively on them (Kress 1997:33).

Using graffiti practices, these children each constructed a 'sign', but also constructed or affirmed an identity for themselves through these signs and their ability to manipulate these signs. Each of the designs in figures 5.9 to 5.12 is a mini-exhibit of how they constructed their identities as members of graffiti designing youth. Two of the boys used their names for their designs. They linked their identity as members of a more global community with their names (representative of their personal identity), thus intertwining the graffiti design with who they are. The translocal aspect of graffiti design is enveloped in the way this event can



be networked with wider literacy practices where the children encounter these designs at home, at school, in the community, on the Internet and in popular magazines.

### 5.3.2. The construction of identity through the global membership of comic designers

The most commonly engaged in design activity across the six participants was comic design. As discussed in chapter 2, comic reading, as a genre of popular culture, is seen by some adults, including teachers, as a threat to school literacy and as not suitable in the discourse around school literacy. There is a belief that if children read comics they will imitate what they have read or seen in the graphics, e.g. being disrespectful to adults, behaving in defiant ways, making use of violence to sort out differences of opinion, or engaging in behaviours that are not accepted in school or the broader community. As Millard and Marsh argue,

The content of comics, then, is often challenging to the social discourse constructed by teachers and their introduction into the classroom a threat to that moral order (2001:27).

Fiske (2003), in his discussion of the understanding of popular culture explains the material and cultural functions of popular culture through the example of a pair of jeans. From a material point of view a pair of jeans provides a covering for the body, whereas,

[t]he cultural function is concerned with meanings and values: All commodities can be used by the consumer to construct meanings of self, of social identity and social relations (ibid: 112).

According to Fiske this cultural meaning of the jeans can be explained through a theory of ideology as he states:

. . . the theory would explain that jeans are so deeply imbued with the ideology of white capitalism that no one wearing them can avoid participation in it and therefore extending it (ibid: 113).

We can look at comic book reading in the same light. Materially, comics are books of a specific genre; sold, bought, read and collected by children and adults. The reading of comic books provides the readers with an added cultural meaning. Comic book reading (whether viewed as “suitable reading material” or not) functions as a recruitment agency to the global membership of comic book reading - many children read, and many adults have read comics at some time in their lives. The children in this research go one step further. As designers of

comics they create for themselves identities as authors of a commodity that is used by others, thus adding a translocal focus to the event.

All six children in this research read comics and three were involved in comic design. The other three were keen readers of their peers' comics. I therefore decided to analyse what it is that these children do as comic designers, how they positioned themselves as authors and how this caused them to derive such enjoyment from the process. During this process I became aware of the limitations of applying only the "events" and "practices" paradigm of NLS to the analysis of the children's literacy activities.

I found that in the analysis of the children's comic designs, I had to go beyond naming and analysing literacy practices and events to consider how the children's literacy practices evolved over time and from other spaces. In Elsie's case she saw how another boy, Saul,<sup>34</sup> (not part of the study) in her class designed comics. These were circulated amongst the grade 6 children. Elsie started copying the idea. This evolved it into a large scale project at home whereby she copied a *Captain Underpants* (e.g. Pilkey 2002) book, which is a hybrid of text and images, into a story consisting of mostly text. Using intertextual links (Lenters 2007:127), she aims to develop the story further into a fully-fledged comic strip. While these may be considered separate literacy events, they are in fact stages of a process that takes place over time. For Elsie there is a type of transcontextual aspect involved in this process. The circulation of texts that were designed in a different space, by another boy, was the stimulus for Elsie to design her own comic story.

In addition to recognising local domains, power and identity construction, I also had to consider the social and cultural involvement of these children who are part of a greater global community of comic designers. I found that the tools of multimodality enabled analysis of

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<sup>34</sup> Saul was initially selected as one of the six participants. However, his mother declined permission for him to participate in the study, saying that he does not like to read at all, is not involved in any literacy practices at home and will add no value to the research. Contrary to the parent's view of her child's literacy practices, he had already written and illustrated four episodes of a comic story named *Power Mouse*, based on *Captain Underpants* series (Pilkey, 1997). These stories are circulated amongst all the interested children in grade 6 and have been read and commented on by all six children in this case study.

the meaning making in these practices and how the children constructed meanings that are built up over time and over several events.

In this case comic designs are not just the result of one event or practice. There appears to be a layering of events and practices. As children engage in reading comic books, they engage in a number of practices, such as swapping, discussing and reading peers' new designs. They thrive on the enjoyment they derive from their interaction with each other and the text. During this process they adjust their own designs, apply and subvert conventions. This results in a multi-layered practice that continues without necessarily ending in a *grand finale*. We therefore need to see the process or processes that make up these layers. A process indicates time. Literacy practices and events do not necessarily provide the tools to capture aspects of space and time. Comic reading and design is part of a popular youth culture. The translocal focus of this global popular culture therefore influences how these children construct themselves as comic readers and designers. In the following section I will analyse the comic designs of three children to demonstrate how they use time and space in their comic designs to take up different identity positions.

### 5.3.3. Construction of author identity through comic designs

Elsie, Richard and Howard designed comics. All three children chose a different way of designing their comics. This positioned each child with a different kind of identity as comic maker. Elsie is an ardent reader of the *Captain Underpants* series (Pilkey 1997, 2002). These books use a combination of text, comic strips and activity pages. The series has been challenged by parents<sup>35</sup> and librarians<sup>36</sup> as possible unsuitable reading for children.

Elsie started to "rewrite" one of the books in the series, *The Adventures of Super Diaper Baby* (Pilkey: 2002), in an old exercise book, resulting in pages of text in dialogue form. She only added a comic strip where she needed to highlight a particular part of the story (Figure 5.13).

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<sup>35</sup> A parent stated that they try hard to stand by their child's choice of genre, 'even if it means *Captain Underpants*' (Lenters 2007:118)

<sup>36</sup> Out of 515 challenged books reported to the [Office for Intellectual Freedom](http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/banned/frequentlychallenged/21stcenturychallenged/2002/index.cfm) of the American Library Association in 2002 *Captain Underpants* was listed as the 6<sup>th</sup> most frequently challenged book due to offensive language and unsuitability to the intended age group. Available from <http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/banned/frequentlychallenged/21stcenturychallenged/2002/index.cfm>

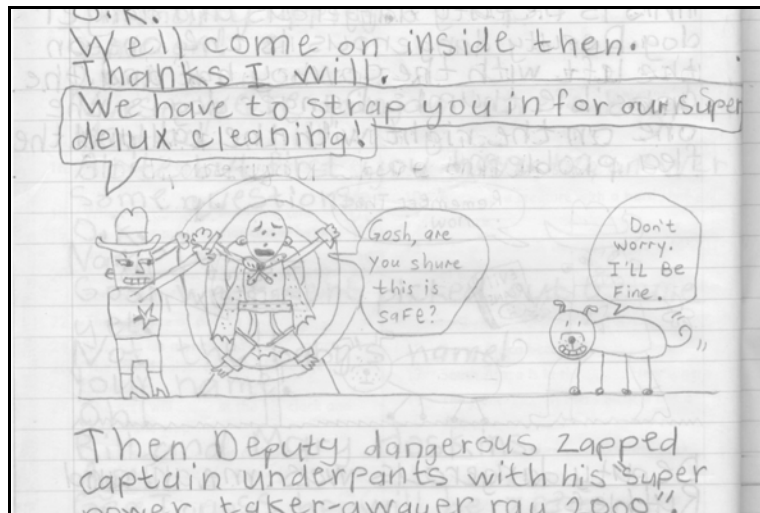


Figure 5.13  
Elsie's comic strip highlighting part of the story.

She is still engaged in writing the script and has kept spaces open between her many sentences where she will add comic frames. Her aim is to convert all the text and graphics from the book to handwritten text. Eventually she wants to turn her handwritten story into a comic strip, thereby reworking her exercise book text into comic strips only. She positions herself as an author who can rewrite a story changing the genre: Firstly, she changes the text and graphics to mostly text with a comic frame at the end of each main idea of the story. Secondly, she intends to use her reworked story and change it into a comic book only.

Richard's comic is an A5 booklet in colour about Power Bunny (Figure 5.14). Richard's figures are more cartoon-like and the animal characters have human characteristics. He uses pencil crayon and tries to draw as perfectly as he can. Richard reports that he has not yet completed it, as he gets too frustrated with the drawings. He adapts the convention of having a number of frames per page to just one frame per page so that he has more space to produce 'perfect' images, as he stated: 'I just want to perfect it'. He constructs his identity as a perfectionist around the perfection of his pictures.

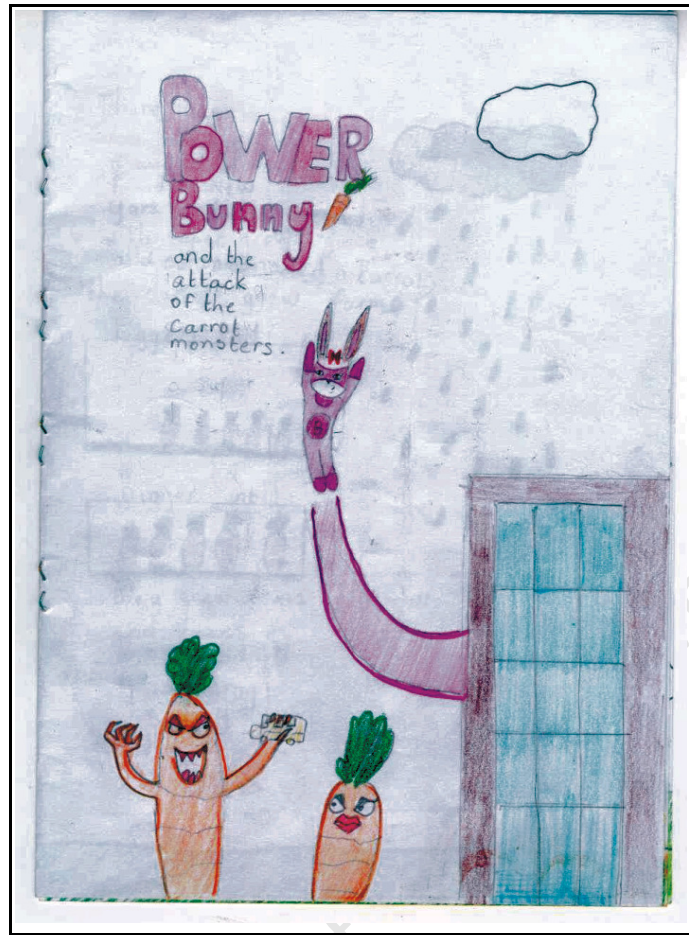
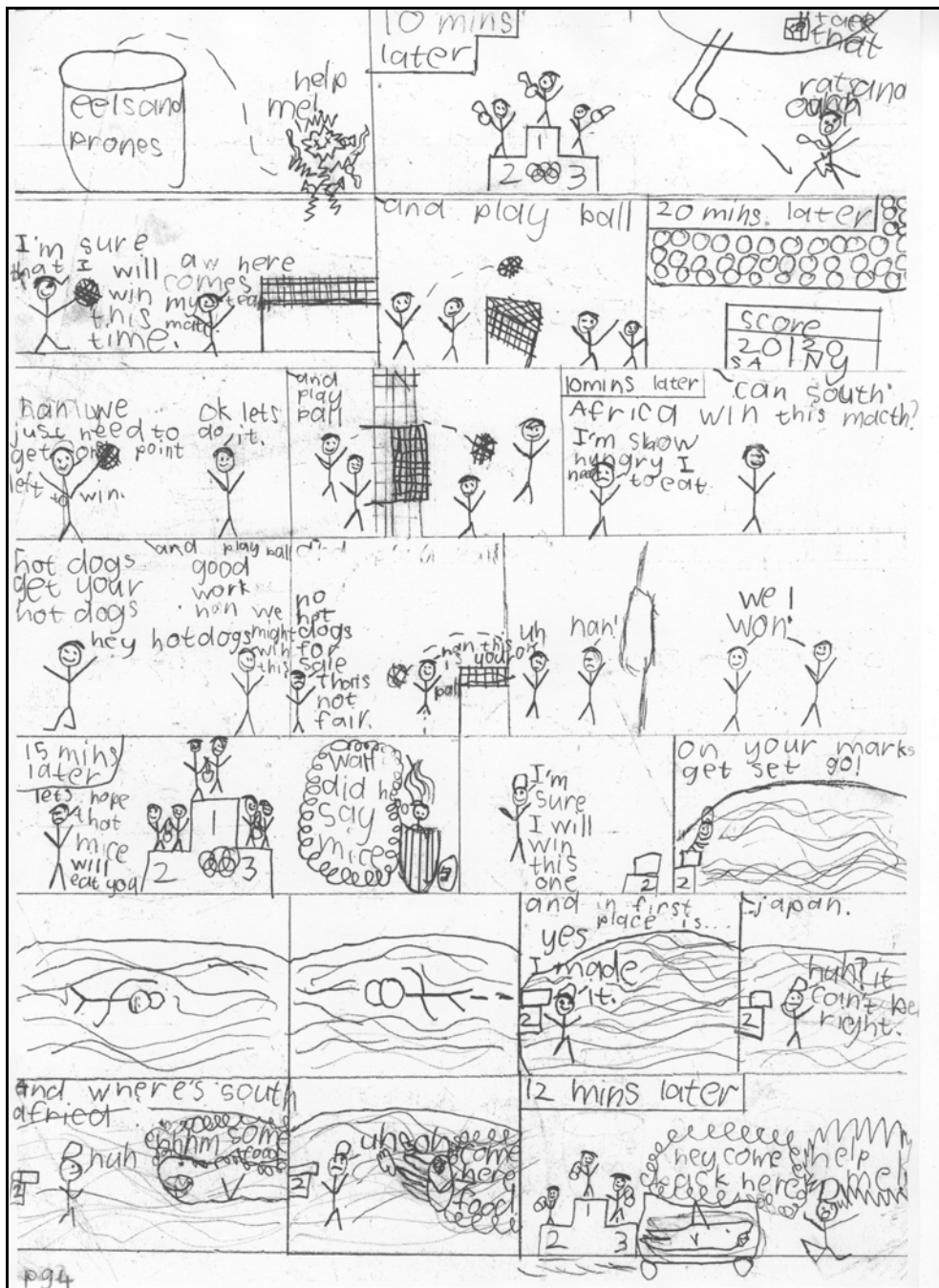


Figure 5.14  
Power Bunny

Howard designed a pencil drawn comic story on the 2008 Beijing Olympics (Figure 5.15). He commenced in June 2008 and continues to add to this comic. He presented a comic book of six loose pages, drawn on both sides. He numbered the first four pages 1 – 8 (summer games) and the last two pages 48 – 50 (winter games). He indicated that he is still thinking up ideas for the missing pages, but they are all about the Olympic Games. Howard's identity construction as author includes the ability to work beyond temporal constraints and to add to the chronology of the story when it suits him. In contrast to Richard's detailed drawings, the characters in Howard's comic strips are simple non-gendered stick figures drawn in pencil. Howard divides his A4 page into many frames and fills up these frames with as many small drawings as he can. He is not hampered by the comic conventions of creating the exact same images (in Richard's terms 'perfect' images) every time. He allows the characters to flow from his pencil into activity-filled pages of narrative.



Clearly all three children have a different approach to their comic designs and in this way asserted their author identities in different ways: Elsie is the rewriter of rewritten work, Richard, the perfectionist and Howard the prolific comic designer. In addition, these children construct themselves as custodians in control of their own creations, initiating and managing the pace at which they generate their designs and the amount of space they allow themselves on their pages. Each of these three children indicated that their designs are still “a work in

progress". For Richard it takes time because he is careful and perfectionist. For Elsie it is a process of first completing the written text so that she can focus on the comic strip when she said 'It is not completed . . . I am still busy'. Howard simply stated 'Well, I am not finished with this'. This illustrates an important distinction between the production of texts out of school as compared with in-school texts: texts produced in school often have due dates. Due dates set the pace at which the tasks have to be executed and could impede creativity. These three children are at liberty to work on their designs whenever they have time, allowing them to strengthen their unique identities as creative authors.

#### 5.3.4. Author identity and audience awareness

Howard also confirms his identity as a perceptive comic author by showing an awareness of his audience. This is seen in his concern that his readers may misread his story because he follows a different arrangement from what is expected. Howard brings the transcontextual into his designs by acknowledging a reader audience outside his design space. Brandt and Clinton point out that often reading and writing is for someone who 'will not be at the scene' (2002:347). By making his intent known, Howard also indicates to his readers that he is aware of comic conventions and the possible misunderstanding in the event of deviation. In this instance Howard's author identity and audience awareness are constructed through his understanding, use and deviation from comic conventions.

On his first page Howard starts off in a left to right direction but continues into the next set of frames from right to left, zigzagging down the page (Figure 5.16). The main picture depicts a long line of people moving with flags at the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games and the zigzag or snaking of the frames portrays a sense of movement. This zigzagging of the frames was repeated on pages 49 and 50.



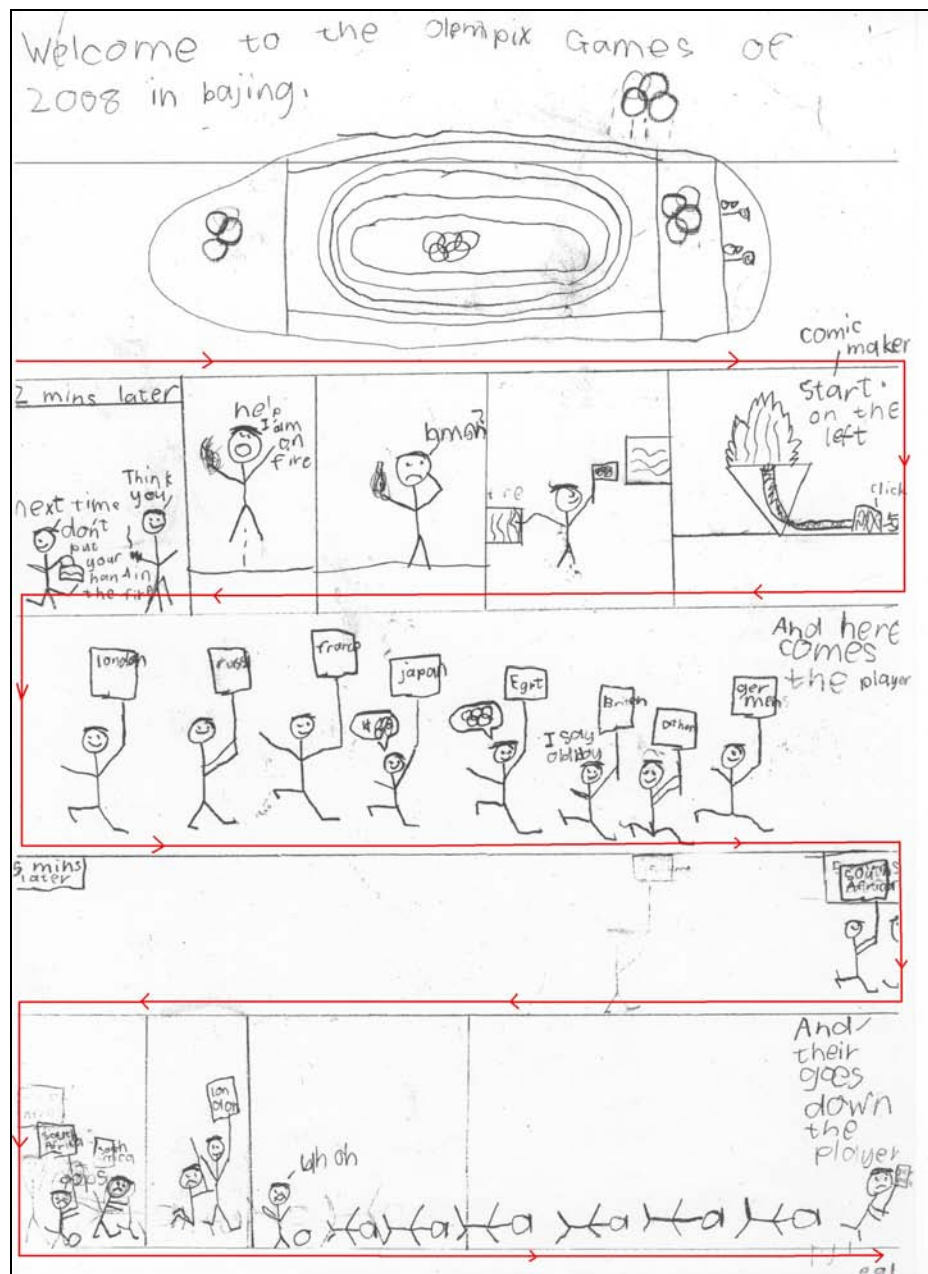


Figure 5.16  
Howard's zigzagged frames on page 1

Howard explains this by writing the instruction: 'Comic maker start on the left' in the sixth frame. It may have been an unintentional error and could have been meant as "Comic reader start on the left". This is confirmed by his explanation:

Howard: *So, now I don't start on the right hand side, now I start on the left side, so I just need to tell them to be careful with some pages.*  
[The red arrowed line depicts where he pointed – Figure 5.16]

Howard continued with the conversation and explained that pages 49 and 50 also read like the snakes and ladders board game. This might be non-conventional in the Western reading



direction, but is not unusual in some comic designs, e.g. manga comics. Howard's use of the word 'them' in 'I need to tell *them* to be careful with some pages' indicates that he was expecting his comics to be read by an audience who may not be aware of deviations from the conventions. He also expects that his designs may be circulated and read by a wider audience. This not only displays an awareness of an audience, but also validates Howard's identity as an author who can make creative modifications to his designs by subverting comic conventions.

#### 5.4. Comic conventions as a platform for identity construction

Comic conventions are aspects of design that interlock with the theme of identity construction. As discussed in chapter 2, the reading of comics requires a certain kind of reading competence and knowledge of comic conventions in order to comprehend the text and graphics. As designers of comics these children demonstrate that they not only understand these conventions, but they can also apply or subvert these conventions. This strengthens their identities as authors of comics, of which some aspects have already been discussed in Howard's designs. In this section I look at the children's use of conventions, how they conform to these and how they subvert or re-appropriate the conventions whilst constructing their identities as authors and designers.

##### 5.4.1. Conventions in comic designs

Howard, Elsie and Richard applied many conventions in their designs. Only some comic conventions will be discussed to show that the children understood their use.

An important aspect of comic conventions is the use of semiotics. This is central to the interpretation of the comic by the reader. Howard makes use of a variety of symbols and comic conventions to portray meaning (Figures 5.17 – 5.21), e.g. music notes for someone singing, 'zzzz' for snoring and '?' for puzzlement. When he drew a cloud of dust around two fighting characters, with just a head, an arm and a foot sticking out, it implied the following: 'There are people fighting inside that *mêlée*'. On the outside of this cloud of dust he drew some squiggly lines, spirals and stars to emphasize that the action that is happening inside the cloud is violent. Howard's spiky circle around the word 'BOOM' to signify an explosion, tells the reader that the explosion is ear-splitting.

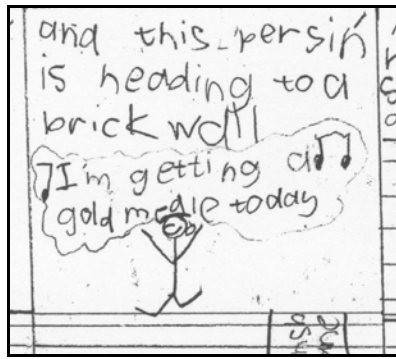


Figure 5.17  
Music notes



Figure 5.18  
Snoring

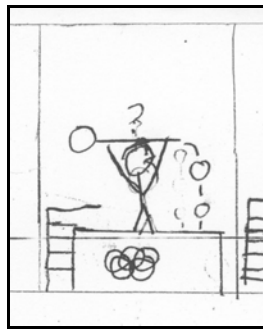


Figure 5.19  
The question mark



Figure 5.20  
The fight

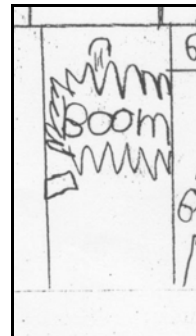


Figure 5.21  
The explosion

Howard also uses lines with his characters or vehicles to indicate the travelling speed of the vehicle or person. It is important to draw attention to the sophistication of the complex semiotic code that these children have mastered in order to execute their designs.

In order to produce a successful comic strip, the designer has to conform to the conventions, e.g. the characters are always the same, or will always be recognized. This appears to be easy

for Howard. All the characters look the same. He uses simple stick figures that appear hastily drawn and at times oddly formed. It is his use of additional accessories that transmits the recognition of the character or the action he intends the reader to understand, e.g. the paramedic's first aid case, the injured in the wheelchair or on a crutch, etc (Figures 5.22 – 5.24). His characters have no specific humour-stimulating facial or body features, except for the shape of the mouth which shows happiness, sadness or anger. His narrative, through the actions of these stick figures and the accompanying text, is what adds the humour to the comic strip.



Figure 5.22

The paramedic



Figure 5.23

Injured in a wheelchair

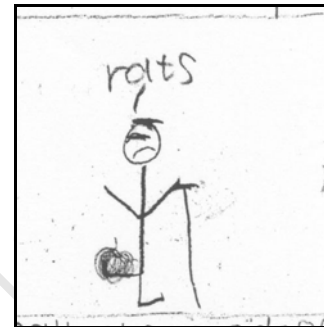


Figure 5.24

Injured on a crutch

In contrast to Howard, Richard indicated great frustration with the drawing of his comic characters. Although Richard enjoys comic drawing as much as Howard and they both were excited to show their comics to the group, Richard is hampered by his insistence on neatness and drawing characters that look exactly the same, in keeping with comic conventions.

He reported that he can only produce a few pages a day because he is frustrated by his inability to draw perfect pictures and said: 'I destroy it and throw it away'. He also said that he loses his ideas when he cannot draw properly. His pastel coloured designs show signs of erased lines in order to create a perfect image (Figure 5.25). Richard's method of painstaking drawing, outlining and colouring in is one way of conforming to comic convention. This seems to curb his creativity.



Figure 5.25

Richard's neat drawings with evidence of using his eraser to obtain the perfect image.

This is in contrast to his method of correcting his errors when he designs graffiti, as discussed earlier. It appears that for Richard, conforming to comic convention does not allow for any margin of error in the final design. It appears that his identity as a good comic illustrator is eroded by his inability to create identical images and can be seen in his comments of 'I throw it away' and 'I lose my ideas'. However, Richard has devised a way to overcome his shortcomings – he changes the convention of having many frames per page. Richard's initiative is discussed below.

#### 5.4.2. Deviation from comic conventions.

In returning to the purpose of my analysis, which is to look at what these children do that identifies them as comic designers, as well as the pleasure they derive from their designs, I discovered that these children can subvert comic conventions to suit their own design purposes.

Conventionally comics are drawn in frames that run from left to right along strips across a page. Howard divides A4 pages into smaller frames using a ruler, with an average of twenty-

two frames of different sizes per page. As explained above, Howard chose to combine left to right and right to left ordering in the zigzag reading path he created. Richard on the other hand folded a three A4 pages in half. He stapled these in the middle to form a booklet of six A5 sized pages. Each page becomes the frame of the comic (Figure 5.26). He reported that this helps him to fit in all the detail he needs to tell the story. In this instance Richard adjusted the convention of many frames per page to one frame per page in order to suit his drawing style. Despite his sense of perfection, this deviation affords Richard a sense of agency: I can choose how I want to adjust my designs. He thus affirms his status as a flexible comic designer.

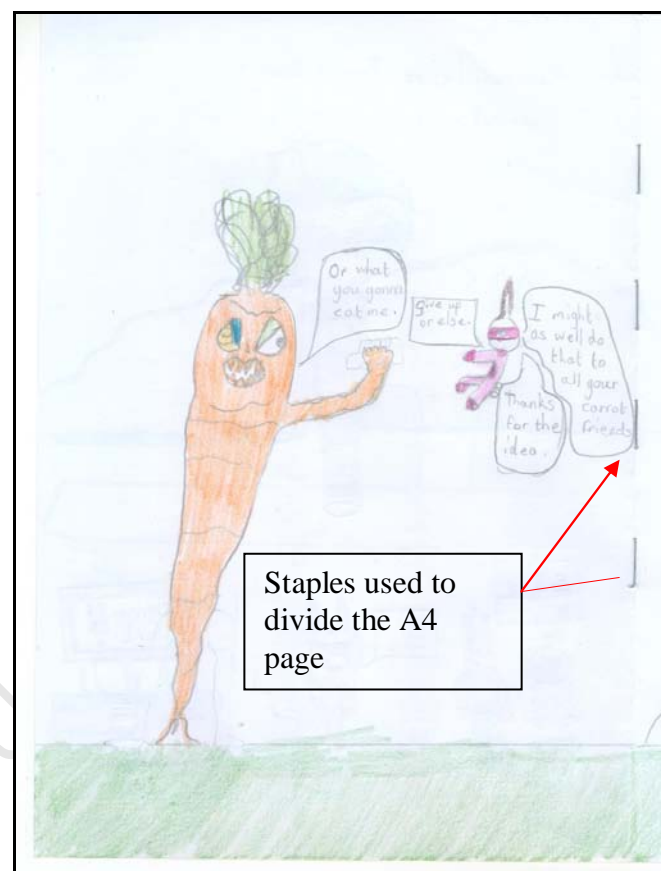


Figure 5.26  
Richard's comics on an A5 size stapled booklet

## 5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed the overarching theme of identity construction that emerged for these children through various features or applications of their practices. They saw themselves as aspirant authors with newsworthy items to report to a wider audience (Elsie's news story), they affirmed their ability to construct messages (Elsie's Easter card), they

became members of the global community of designers of popular culture by designing comics and graffiti (all six children), they affirmed their authorship by being aware of their reader audience (Howard) and they shaped their identity around future aspirations as house designers (Isaaq).

Elsie, Richard and Howard showed a sophisticated awareness of conventions in comic design and how they could apply and subvert these conventions, e.g. Howard was not hampered by the convention to draw identical figures and Richard made a plan to divert from small frames when he needed more space. The children's ability to subvert comic conventions reinforced the identities that they have constructed for themselves around literacy production and design. Elsie, Richard and Howard also indicated their design practices are not bound by time, or captured in a single event. In this instance the earlier language of description of NLS is limited in describing an out of school practice such as comic designs. It does not do justice to the global spaces that children tap into for text designs and production. The evidence of the translocal in the children's use of resources and design features show that they extract inspiration from the global or popular youth culture.

The practices of designing comics, in which conventions are followed and subverted, show how the children have asserted themselves as authors and designers who derive joy from their literacy practices. This chapter gives a clear indication that despite SLD these children are not hindered in expressing themselves as producers or designers of texts.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

### 6.1. Overview of the study

This research, in the form of a case study, investigated the out of school literacy practices of six children with specific learning disabilities (SLD). The theoretical framework for this research is drawn from New Literacy Studies (NLS) (*cf.* Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983; Street, 1995; 2003; 2004) and the emergent literacy paradigm (*cf.* Clay, 1972; Teale & Sulzby, 1991) whereby literacy is seen as a situated, socio-cultural practice. These 'cultural ways of utilising literacy' (Barton & Hamilton, 1998:7) result in literacy practices that vary according to the different sociocultural contexts in which they take place. Thus one would expect out of school literacy practices to differ from so-called traditional in-school practices. Using these NLS and emergent literacy lenses enabled me to identify unconventional literacy practices of school going children and the not-yet conventional practices of pre-schoolers. I also used a multimodal approach in the analysis of the children's literacy designs.

The children participating in this research are all in grade six in an LSEN school. They are from middle class families. In order to eliminate variables, the children selected were all considered good readers and writers for their grade, with English as their mother tongue. As there is a dearth of research on the out of school literacy practices of children with SLD, both nationally and internationally, there was no benchmark to use as basis for comparison of out of school literacy practices. The literacy practices identified in this research are therefore analysed and compared within the case study.

Data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews – group and individual, observations and artefacts. Data from emergent literacy practices were collected by reconstructing events and practices with the children from their memories of their engagement in these activities. The features of out of school literacy practices that emerged from the literature review in Chapter 2 were useful in identifying the literacy practices<sup>37</sup>. I found evidence of a wide range of literacy practices and made a broad distinction between practices of consumption of text, e.g. book reading and practices of production and design,

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<sup>37</sup> See Appendix 7 for some examples of the out of school literacy practices that were found in this study that match the features described in the list in Chapter 2.

e.g. story writing, card making, home-, graffiti- and comic designs. Data from these categories answered the first research question: What are the out of school literacy practices of a group of children with specific learning disabilities attending a South African LSEN school?

The secondary question is: What is the affective engagement with out of school literacy practices of these children with specific learning disabilities? Although more difficult to pin down, observations of the use of semantics, vocabulary, body language, non-verbal signs, general relationships and subtle interactions between the children revealed a wealth of information about their affective engagement in their literacy practices. The over-riding affective aspect was the enjoyment that these children obtained from their involvement in their own out of school literacy practices. I analysed a number of themes emerging from the data: Book reading as a literacy practice presented with three themes: (1) the embodiment of reading practices as seen in the pleasure derived from, and rituals performed around book reading, (2) the immense value of books communicated to the children in these households and (3) the construction of family relationships through book reading rituals. The early NLS language of description became problematic when trying to find descriptors for the ongoing processes of literacy practices. The forging of family relationships around literacy practices is an ongoing process. It involves space, time, human relations and a family unit. These aspects are not bound within any one literacy practice or event. They are all aspects of a literacy journey that flow from one context to the next and thus are transcontextual (*cf.* Kell, 2009).

One overarching theme emerged from the analysis of the children's production and design practices: the construction of identity through production and design of texts. I argue that the construction of identities through text design is interrelated with the use of conventions in the children's designs. I also draw attention to the layered processes of children's text design, particularly with comic design over time and through use of other spaces. Again, I found the language of description of NLS limited: it can accurately account for the literacy event or practice, but not necessarily the process that happens over time. The children's design practices are part of a wider global popular culture, following Clinton and Brandt's (2002) notion of the connectedness between the local and the global. The children draw inspiration from these spaces in their designs. There is thus evidence of the translocal (Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009) in their use and subversion of conventions of the comic genre.



## 6.2. Reflections on the findings

### 6.2.1. Out of school literacy practices and children

The out of school literacy practices of the children in this investigation resulted in an array of findings. I gave evidence of the children's involvement in both the consumption and production of texts as they showed themselves to be designers and avid readers, despite their learning disabilities. They unanimously declared their love of books, enthusiastically expressed the joy they derive from sharing book reading practices with family members and keenly described their creative use and subversion of design conventions.

The frequent reference that was made to comics has been a significant and surprising finding<sup>38</sup>. I contend that the reading of comics requires a sophisticated level of reading competence (Greany, 1980) as comic reading involves the interpretation of many conventions, e.g. time lapses between frames or different types of speech bubbles indicating different speaking modes. Children with SLD find these aspects difficult to navigate and interpret, yet the children in this research had sufficiently overcome their individual perceptual and other barriers in order to fully enjoy the consumption and production of comic texts.

### 6.2.2. Out of school literacy practices and the school

Although this study focused only on out of school literacy practices, the contrast between in and out of school literacy practices was pervasive throughout the discussions on current literacy practices. Surprisingly, and contrary to teacher perceptions, computers, computer games or cell phones did not feature as an out of school literacy practice.

The children discussed reasons for enjoying reading at home and frustrations about reading at home or school. Teachers may be aware of and even understand that there are unconventional and alternative literacy practices to the so-called traditionally accepted school practices. Yet we cannot forget that the motivation for engaging in such practices is derived

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<sup>38</sup> All the children enjoy reading comics. One child had a large collection of well-known comic books and for another a Garfield comic book was his most favourite. Another child collected comic strips in a scrap book. Three out of the six children in this case study chose to draw or design comics, with the other three being eager consumers of their peers' designs.

from the enjoyment experienced in such practices in the first place. It is this enjoyment that teachers should tap into by allowing the unique characteristics of out of school literacy practices to influence the teachers' choices for in-school practices. This may lead to a greater connectedness between home and school literacy practices as advocated by Millard and Marsh.

We believe that at a time when literacy practices are changing, both at home and in school, it is imperative that schools examine the materials they provide to ensure that the interests of all children are reflected in the texts made available for sharing in the home (Millard & Marsh, 2001:37).

At FPS teachers employ a remedial practice whereby the literacy 'wrongs' are 'corrected' or utilize learning support methods whereby the 'struggling' reader or writer is given skills to overcome the deficit. As can be seen from the children's comments<sup>39</sup>, literacy activities, whether for learning, leisure or intervention, need to be meaningful, motivating, authentic and much more multimodal.

According to Alvermann *et al* (2007) it is the everyday literacies of struggling readers that should be tapped as a source for educational practices. This could allude to the notion that out of school literacy practices of children with SLD could contribute to meaningful educational programmes. These children may benefit more from in-school reading and writing activities that also include design or production activities such as card making, house and graffiti designs, and designing comic stories. By incorporating some of the lesser employed literacy practices, school programmes can offer a wider variety of text production that is more relevant to children.

### 6.2.3. A personal moment

The most outstanding finding was the evidence of vibrant enjoyment that these children experienced in their out of school literacy practices, regardless of how unconventional these practices may seem to their teachers and despite the children not being fluent and error free readers and writers. The disapproving comments from some children about in-school literacy

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<sup>39</sup> 'There is nothing new and it is just sometimes boring' (Isaaq); 'Because it's comprehension I just don't like it' (Richard); 'You have a half an hour for reading, you still want to go on, but then the teacher says you must do the work now.' (Quinton); 'There is nothing adventurous to read' (Daniel); 'English books, it give me a headache, like comprehension and stuff'. (Isaaq); '. . . and then miss says: "Just put that away, just put that away!"' (Elsie, on discussing the teacher's response to a child wanting to pursue his own story writing in class.)

practices show clearly that these children can verbalise their affect and emotions about their literacy practices both in and out of school. It is possible that you, the reader, would have forgotten at certain stages of this study that these children are diagnosed with SLD. I would argue that focusing on their engagement with literacy practices out of school constructed them as 'normal' and not as 'struggling'. My perception of these children's literacy practices changed dramatically through the process of the research and the data collection. They engaged so widely and with so much enthusiasm in their literacy practices, that it de-emphasised their learning barriers. This was a personal moment of insight.

### 6.3. Limitations

The findings of this study cannot be generalized. The study was carried out with English mother tongue speaking children from middle class homes. All these children were diagnosed with SLD and attended a LSEN school. They represented 8% of the grade six children in the school and were the top readers and writers in their grade. Children from different backgrounds with different mother tongues and different barriers may present different findings. In addition, the investigation and data capturing of the study was done over a relatively short period of time, i.e. four months. Although a detailed general analysis was given of the findings, there may be deeper underlying causes for the results, the investigation of which was limited by the time constraints and the scope of the investigation.

### 6.4. Recommendations for further research

More detailed research needs to be carried out in order to establish what the out of school literacies of all children with special needs are and how these findings can assist teachers in the classroom. There needs to be a greater emphasis on the literacy journeys that all children undertake as they navigate their way through time and space and across domains. Researchers will have to uncover more of the 'family secrets' that are found out of schools and in family units of these children with learning barriers – secrets that construct the 'struggling' school reader as a capable reader and writer out of school.

Rather than thinking of school as initiating a child's education it is increasingly important to see it as building from the processes already begun within families and communities (Millard, 2005: 57).

LSEN schools and teachers need to expand school literacy practices and processes by drawing on home literacy practices and processes. They need to use home literacy practices and processes as a bridge to school literacy practices and processes. This will give hope to these special children so that they too, can enjoy being acknowledged readers and writers in schools.

## **APPENDIX 1: Some features of out of school literacy practices that emerged from the literature study**

1. The de-emphasis of the written word and/or the preference for images.
2. Reflection on literacy practices, as opposed to simply completing literacy tasks.
3. They may lack time limits or time constraints, have no specific “due dates”.
4. They may have an absence of adult supervision.
5. They may take place in informal learning spaces.
6. They may negotiate different identities for children.
7. They may be unconventional.
8. They may lack social power in the formal or school setting.
9. They may overlap with other literacy domains (in school and out of school)
10. They may be pursued by both proficient readers and ‘at risk’ readers.

## **APPENDIX 2: A snap-shot of the participants**

### **Elsie**

Age:	13y 0m
Gender:	Female
Primary Learning barrier:	Specific Learning Disability
Secondary Learning barrier:	ADHD
Medication:	Methylphenidate (for hyperactivity), Risperdal (for anxiety)
Family composition:	Father, mother, sister (tertiary student) and grandmother
Father's occupation:	Administrator
Mother's Education:	Primary School teacher

Elsie is a year older than her peers in MS grade 6. In her pre-school years she spent some time in hospital for treatment. She loves all reading related activities.

### **Richard**

Age:	12y 8m
Gender:	Male
Primary Learning barrier:	Specific Learning Disability
Secondary Learning barrier:	None
Medication:	Beclate (for asthma), Allergix (for allergies) when necessary
Family composition:	Mother, stepfather, three sisters and grandmother
Father's occupation:	Unknown
Mother's occupation:	Receptionist

Richard is a non-athletic boy with high anxiety levels. He is older than his peers in MS grade 6. He is afraid of making mistakes and sets high standards for himself. He is meticulous and pays great attention to detail. In writing activities he uses his eraser extensively and constantly sharpens his pencils.

**Isaaq**

Age: 11y 11m  
Gender: Male  
Primary Learning barrier: Specific Learning Disability  
Secondary Learning barrier: ADHD  
Medication: None  
Family composition: Mother, stepfather, two brothers  
Stepfather's occupation: Educator  
Mother's occupation: Accountant – in management position

Isaaq lost his biological father when he was three years old. He is age appropriate for grade 6. He becomes very shy when he is not sure about himself, and he often whispers answers.

**Howard**

Age: 12y 11m  
Gender: Male  
Primary Learning barrier: Specific Learning Disability  
Secondary Learning barrier: Autistic Spectrum Disorder  
Medication: None  
Family composition: Mother, father and sister  
Father's occupation: Director of business development  
Mother's occupation: Stay-at-home mother

Howard is a year older than his peers in MS grade 6. He is a quiet routine-bound boy, who sometimes misunderstands figurative speech. He speaks in a monotone voice with a speech mannerism known as epenthesis<sup>1</sup>. His speech is sometimes difficult to understand, but he is well integrated with his peers.

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<sup>1</sup> The addition of extra vowels to the ends of words.

### **Quinton**

Age: 11y 8m

Gender: Male

Primary Learning barrier: Specific Learning Disability

Secondary Learning barrier: None

Medication: None

Family composition: Mother, father, two brothers and two sisters

Father's occupation: University lecturer

Mother's occupation: Administrator

Quinton is age appropriate for grade 6. He speaks with a quiet voice. He loves books and public libraries.

### **Daniel**

Age: 12y 0m

Gender: Male

Primary Learning barrier: Specific Learning Disability

Secondary Learning barrier: None, although he is described as very active, distractible and inattentive by his teachers

Medication: None

Family composition: Mother and two sisters

Father's occupation: Manager at government department

Mother's occupation: Sales and marketing

Daniel is age appropriate for grade 6. He is a very active boy who loves any kind of sport. He is often seen running around on the playground or in the school passages. He sometimes displays an indifference towards school work and teacher reprimands. He is sometimes in trouble for minor misdemeanors because of impulsive actions.



### **APPENDIX 3: Semi-structured interview guidelines - introductory group interview 1**

#### Rules

1. We do not interrupt each other.
2. We take turns (Participants to help determine selection of turn taking: random, round the table, draw your name)

#### Interview

1. Introduction by researcher
  - Name and occupation
  - Background of research / study
  - Choice of participants
    - i. Researcher wanted children with SLD who like to read and write and who are better at reading and writing in grade 6
    - ii. Chosen by teachers
      - a.Children who like reading and/or writing
      - b.Children who are better at reading and writing
      - c.There are others in your class who are better than you at reading and writing, but they have a different disability / barrier (physical disability or ASD)
      - d.You are therefore not necessarily the best at reading and writing, in your class, but you like reading and writing and are the children with SLD who are best at reading and writing.
  - Parent consent form and its meaning
  - Learner consent form and its meaning
  - Signing of agreement
2. Introduction of the members of the panel: our names
3. Getting to know each other
  - Where do you live?
  - Tell us about your family you live with.
  - What is your favourite food and cooldrink?
  - What do you like doing best when you are at home?
  - What would you like to become one day?
  - Why do you like reading and/or writing?

#### 4. Reading and Writing

- What do we understand by the word *Reading* at school? (refer to subject in FP and IP), e.g. when the teacher says: 'Do your *Reading* for homework'.
- What do we understand by the word *Writing* at school? (refer to subject in FP and IP), e.g. when the teacher says: 'We are now going to do writing in this period'.

#### 5. Reading and writing out of school

- What reading do you do out of school, that is not school work or homework?
- What writing do you do out of school, that is not school work or homework?

#### 6. Next session

- This will be a show and tell session
- Bring samples of anything that you do with pens, pencil and/or paper or any reading and writing that you do at home or away from school so that I can see what you do or how reading and writing are used by you in your home environment.
- You can also take pictures of what you do with reading and writing at home. Sometimes samples are too big and bulky to bring to school, so a picture will show the group what you can do.
- Hand out notice as reminder

## **APPENDIX 4: Semi-structured interview guidelines for group interview 2: current out of school literacy practices**

### **Rules**

1. We do not interrupt each other.
2. We take turns (Determine selection of turn taking: random, round the table, draw your name?)

### **Interview**

1. Show and tell
  - Each child gets a chance to show the literacy practices they do at home:
    - i. Samples
    - ii. Books that they read
    - iii. Photographs
2. General discussion around literacy practices. Guidelines to types of questions – depends on artefacts/books/samples/photographs brought from home
  - When do you do this activity?
  - Explain how you do it.
  - With whom do you share these activities / who reads it?
  - Why do you like it?
  - When did you first start doing these activities?
  - Is there a special place at home where you do these activities?
  - Do you do any of these types of activities at school?
3. Next session
  - This will be a show and tell session
  - Bring samples of any reading and writing that you did before you went to school, maybe at home, pre-school or crèche, before you could read or write and before you went to grade 1.
  - You can also bring pictures showing how or what you read and wrote before you went to grade 1. Sometimes samples are too big and bulky to bring to school, so a picture will show the group what you did when you were younger.
  - Hand out notice as reminder

## **APPENDIX 5: Semi-structured interview guidelines for group interview 3: emergent literacy practices**

### **Rules**

1. We do not interrupt each other.
2. We take turns (Determine selection of turn taking: random, round the table, draw your name?)

### **Interview**

1. Show and tell
  - Each child gets a chance to show the literacy practices they did before school:
    - i. Samples
    - ii. Books that they read
    - iii. Photographs
2. General discussion around literacy practices. Guidelines to types of questions – depends on artefacts/books/samples/photographs brought from home
  - When did you do this activity / how old were you?
  - Explain how you did it.
  - With whom did you share this activity?
  - Why did you do this activity, e.g. mother's day, Christmas card, etc.
  - What else can you remember around this time?
  - How did you feel when you did this activity?
  - Why was this artefact kept? Was it a favourite? Was it your first?
  - Did your perceptions of reading / writing change once you went to 'real' school?
3. Next session
  - This will be an activity session showing the rest of the group how we use reading and writing.
  - There will be individual interviews where you can tell me more about your own reading and writing practices.
  - If you have any more samples you may bring them with you.
  - Hand out notice as reminder.

## **APPENDIX 6: Semi-structured interview guidelines for individual interviews.**

Guidelines for possible questions that were not covered in the group interviews. These questions may therefore be a repeat of questions from the group interview.

### **1. Reading and Writing**

- Why do you like reading and/or writing?
- What do we understand by the word *Reading* at school? (refer to subject in FP and IP), e.g. Do your Reading for homework.
- What do we understand by the word *Writing* at school? (refer to subject in FP and IP), e.g. We are now going to do writing in class.

### **2. Reading and writing out of school**

- What reading do you do out of school, that is not school work or homework?
- What writing do you do out of school, that is not school work or homework?
- When do you do this activity?
- Explain how you do it.
- With whom do you share these activities / who reads it?
- Why do you like it?
- When did you first start doing these activities?
- Is there a special place at home where you do these activities?
- Do you do any of these types of activities at school?

### **3. Emergent literacy**

- Do you remember your favourite 'baby' story?
- Do you still have any 'baby' books?
- How did reading / writing change for you once you got to 'real' school?

### **4. General questions**

- Is there a place where your books are kept at home?
- What happens to 'old' books at home?
- What books do your parents read?

### **5. Any other general comments about reading and writing out of school.**

**APPENDIX 7: Some examples of literacy practices that match the features of out of school literacy practices.**

	<b>A feature of out of school literacy practices</b>	<b>Example/s of out of school literacy practices by the participants</b>
1.	The de-emphasis of the written word and or the preference for images.	Card making, graffiti designs, house designs and comic designs
2.	Reflection on literacy practices, as opposed to simply completing literacy tasks.	Elsie added comic strips to her writing after viewing a peer's designs.
3.	Lack of time limits or time constraints, with no specific "due dates".	Howard and Elsie's comic stories are ongoing activities.
4.	They may take place in informal learning spaces and times.	Book reading took place in bedrooms, outside or in 'free time' at school.
5.	They may negotiate different identities for children.	Quinton became the teacher as he taught his brother to read from his first baby books. Isaaq's gender specific rooms validates him as a gender sensitive house designer.
6.	They may be unconventional when compared to school practices.	Elsie used not yet conventional emergent writing on an Easter card. Isaaq's house designs are not conventional school practices.
7.	They may lack social power in the formal or school setting.	Comic books do not have the same status school readers. Comic, graffiti and house designs are not seen as important literacy aspects of the grade 6 curriculum.
8.	They may overlap with other literacy domains (in school and out of school)	Isaaq used a school library book to teach his brother to play cricket at home.
9.	They may be pursued by both proficient readers and 'at risk' readers.	The SLD diagnosis of participants was no deterrent for reading and writing practices. They read the same books <sup>2</sup> as mentioned in Lenters' (2007) case study of a non-SLD diagnosed participant.
10.	They may be done without adult supervision	No parental supervision of Elsie's story writing, Howard and Richard's comic designs, Isaaq's house designs, Daniel's graffiti designs and Quinton's personal book choice.

<sup>2</sup> *Captain Underpants* series by D. Pilkey, *A series of Unfortunate events* by L. Snickett and *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling

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